



Understanding Students' Academic Resilience in Facing Skills Competency Test Anxiety Using the Draw and Tell Method

Jubaidah^{*1}, Andi Wahyu Irawan²

¹²Bimbingan dan Konseling, Universitas Mulawarman, Samarinda, Indonesia

Abstract. The Vocational School Competency Test (UKK) is an important final stage for students, but it often causes anxiety that affects their academic and psychological readiness. High pressure to pass UKK can lead to decreased confidence and stress among students. This study aims to understand the experiences of grade XII vocational school students in dealing with anxiety ahead of UKK and to explore the role of resilience in managing this anxiety. The subjects of the study were three grade XII vocational school students from different majors who were selected based on the criteria of experiencing anxiety related to UKK and having resilience characteristics. The approach used is qualitative with a double exploration case study design. Data was collected through in-depth interviews and draw and tell methods, then analyzed thematically. The results showed that students' anxiety was triggered by internal factors (e.g., self-doubt, technical unpreparedness) and external factors (parental pressure, negative stories from seniors, worries about examiners). Anxiety has a noticeable impact on students' daily activities, such as difficulty concentrating and enjoying free time. Resilience emerges as a protective factor through a variety of adaptive strategies, including practice and repetition of material, independent learning, positive affirmations, self-talk, and social support from peers and teachers. The draw and tell method effectively depicts a symbolic shift in students' emotions, from pre-exam anxiety to post-exam relief. These findings emphasize the importance of emotional support and mental guidance for vocational school students in dealing with UKK.

Keywords: Social Support, Coping Strategies, Emotional Visualization, Technical Readiness, Parental Pressure.

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Author Correspondence: Jubaidah, juubaidahida24@gmail.com, Samarinda, Indonesia.



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Introduction

Vocational education is designed to prepare students with skills that meet the needs of the workforce, with a strong emphasis on practical competencies so that graduates are ready to enter the industry. One of the main indicators of the achievement of competence of vocational graduates in Indonesia is the Skills Competency Test (*Skills Competency Test*/UKK), which must be taken by all vocational school students before graduating. UKK serves to measure the extent to which students have mastered their field of expertise and serves as a benchmark for their readiness to enter the world of work (Sudradjat & Djanegara, 2020, Yahya et al., 2023). Ideally, the implementation of UKK ensures that each graduate meets national competency standards and responds to industry demands. Schools and stakeholders

devote substantial efforts to prepare students for UKK through specialized training and practical sessions (Sulistiyanto et al., 2023). The industry's need for skilled labor makes UKK results a major concern, research by Fauzi et al. (2020), for example, showing that industry demands have a significant influence on the implementation and success of UKK in vocational schools.

However, in practice, facing UKK is not always easy for students. The period leading up to UKK is often accompanied by high academic pressure that can trigger anxiety. Previous research has identified various obstacles during UKK, such as difficulty following practical procedures, challenges in answering theory questions, communication barriers, equipment limitations, and tight time pressures. This condition can cause stress and anxiety, reduce motivation and confidence in learning, and potentially interfere with exam performance and the achievement of students' competencies. Exam anxiety is a common emotional reaction among learners facing important evaluations, and all students may experience some level of anxiety before, during, or after the exam (Lestari & Budiyo, 2023). The severity of anxiety ranges from mild to severe, excessive anxiety can negatively impact a person's physical and psychological condition. Among adolescents, high levels of anxiety can manifest in difficulty concentrating, sleep disturbances, emotional instability, and, if left untreated, feelings of hopelessness or depressive symptoms (Afifah, 2023). Double (2025) found a negative association between anxiety levels and UKK outcomes: students with higher anxiety tended to score lower. Lestari & Budiyo (2023) Similarly, it has been reported that increased anxiety before exams is associated with decreased academic performance. Anxiety can also interfere with students' daily lives, for example, one of the participants in this study, Mimi, reported difficulty enjoying her free time because her mind was constantly preoccupied with UKK, even when doing activities such as watching online videos. This is in line with Wulandari & Lestari (2022), which found that academic stress, such as math anxiety, can reduce learning comfort and distract students.

However, not all students respond to UKK-related pressures in the same way. Some are able to manage problems and stress relatively well, while others struggle to adapt. The ability to recover and function adaptively in the face of stress is referred to as resilience, which is the positive capacity of individuals to adapt when faced with change and challenges (Salim & Fakhurrozi, 2020). Academic resilience helps students maintain achievement even in stressful situations. Factors that affect student resilience include individual characteristics, family support, and supportive community (Dewinda et al., 2024). Resilient students tend to see challenging situations as opportunities to grow, manage their emotions more effectively, and seek adaptive solutions rather than giving up (Dalmış et al., 2025). Social support also plays a key role: peer support has been found to correlate positively with academic resilience (Almun & Ash Shiddiqy, 2022, Candrakanti & Chusairi, 2022). With adequate emotional support from his or her environment, students can become more resilient to academic stress and better able to maintain focus on learning goals, while a lack of support can exacerbate anxiety and reduce motivation.

Although exam anxiety and student resilience have been widely studied, there is still a gap in the literature regarding the exploration of in-depth resilience across various vocational majors in the context of UKK anxiety. Most previous research has focused on anxiety before

UKK in a single area of expertise (e.g., nursing or pharmacy) and has not fully examined how resilience factors operate across different vocational pathways. Larasati et al. (2022), for example, found that pharmacy students' anxiety before UKK was characterized by fear of not being able to answer questions, high expectations of getting good grades, and concerns about strict supervisors, but their study did not explore anxiety management strategies or differences between majors. Also Aseta et al. (2023) and Savitri & Swandi (2023) measured anxiety levels among nursing vocational students who faced competency certification exams and reported moderate to high levels of anxiety, but did not investigate in depth how students used resilience to cope. Many of these studies relied on questionnaires or other quantitative measures. There is still a scarcity of qualitative research that explores the subjective experiences of students from various majors faced by UKK, especially research that uses creative methods such as draw and tell to uncover emotional dynamics.

The draw and tell method itself is rarely used in research on exam anxiety at the vocational level, although it has the potential to reveal students' emotional expressions in a symbolic and nuanced way. Drawing and storytelling invite participants to express their feelings through images and then explain the meanings behind the colors, shapes, and symbols they choose. This allows researchers to access emotional layers that may be difficult to articulate verbally. Goodwin et al. (2023) Point out that drawing and storytelling are effective in helping teens who tend to be silent or hesitant to express their feelings, as pictures can serve as clues to richer discussions. As such, this method offers an innovative approach to bridging the communication gap between researchers and adolescent participants, especially when discussing sensitive topics such as anxiety.

The urgency of this research lies in the need for a more comprehensive understanding of the dynamics of anxiety and resilience among vocational students ahead of UKK. UKK serves as a gateway for vocational students to transition into the world of work, so their success in this exam is very important. Uncontrollable excessive anxiety can not only lower test results but also interfere with students' mental health and long-term readiness for work Mubayyinah & Dasalinda (2023). By understanding the sources of anxiety and resilience strategies used by students, schools and guidance and counseling (BK) teachers can design more appropriate interventions. Merzaq et al. (2023) It found a significant negative correlation between exam anxiety and psychological resilience, suggesting that increasing resilience can reduce anxiety. Hayat et al. (2021) It also suggests that academic resilience may mediate the relationship between low self-efficacy and exam anxiety. In addition, the period leading up to UKK is often characterized by high parental expectations of academic achievement, and excessive parental pressure has been shown to increase performance anxiety in adolescents (Hoirunnurmalasari et al., 2025, Li & Wang, 2024).

Given these considerations, this study focused specifically on four key aspects of students' experiences: (1) their anxiety in dealing with UKK, (2) their emotional expressions before and after UKK as visualized through draw and tell, (3) the perceived impact of UKK-related anxiety on their daily lives, and (4) the coping and resilience strategies they used to manage this anxiety. However, little is known about how these four aspects are revealed in the daily lives of vocational students from various majors in the Indonesian context. This creates a clear research gap: the lack of large-scale, qualitative cross-sectional investigations

that combine verbal narratives and visual methods to explore UKK-related anxiety and resilience. Based on this gap, this research was guided by the following research questions:

1. How do Class XII vocational students from various majors experience and interpret their anxiety before the Skills Competency Test (UKK)?
2. How do they express their emotional state regarding UKK through the draw and tell method?
3. What impact does anxiety related to UKK have on their daily lives?
4. What coping and resilience strategies do they use to manage UKK-related anxiety?

Therefore, this study aims to deeply understand the subjective experiences of Class XII vocational students from various majors in dealing with anxiety before UKK and to explore how resilience helps them manage such stress. Through an exploratory double case study design that integrates semi-structured interviews and draw and tell methods, this study seeks to generate a rich narrative about the sources of anxiety, its emotional and practical impacts, coping and resilience strategies used, and changes in emotional states before and after UKK. These findings are expected to contribute theoretically to the understanding of the interaction between anxiety and exam resistance, and practically to the development of more effective psychological support and guidance strategies for vocational students facing UKK.

Method

Research Design

This study uses a dual case study design of exploration to capture the nuanced emotional experiences and resilience processes faced by vocational students *Skills Competency Test* (UKK). A qualitative approach was chosen to allow for an in-depth understanding of participants' subjective meanings and contextual dynamics surrounding exam anxiety and coping. The exploratory dual case study design allows for comparisons across cases representing different vocational majors, revealing a shared and unique pattern of experiences. The researcher serves as the primary instrument for data collection and analysis, consistent with the interpretivist paradigm of qualitative inquiry (Assyakurrohim et al., 2022).

Participants

The participants consisted of three SMK Class XII students during the 2024/2025 school year, each representing a different major to ensure diversity in academic and emotional contexts. The first participant, Mimi, came from the Department of Nursing, the second, Bubu, from the Department of Motorcycle Engineering and Business (TBSM), and the third, Kevin, from the Department of Visual Communication Design (DKV). One female participant (Mimi), and two men (Bubu and Kevin).

The inclusion criteria were as follows: (1) grade XII students prepared for UKK, (2) experienced symptoms of anxiety related to UKK, (3) showed resilience characteristics such as perseverance or optimism, and (4) voluntarily agreed to participate in the research. Participants were recruited through purposive sampling with the help of teachers who identified students who fit the criteria.

Table 1. Participant Profile (Demographics)

Disguise	Class	Gender	Department
Mimi	XII	Woman	Nursing
Fish trap	XII	Man	TBSM
Kevin	XII	Man	DKV

Participant Recruitment Procedure

Participants were recruited through purposive sampling to ensure that those selected met specific inclusion criteria relevant to the research objectives. These criteria include: (1) being a Class XII vocational student preparing for the *Skills Competency Test* (UKK), (2) experiencing symptoms of exam-related anxiety, (3) showing behavioral or emotional indicators of resilience such as perseverance or optimism, and (4) voluntarily agreeing to participate.

The recruitment process is carried out with the help of teachers and school counselors who identify students who fit the inclusion criteria. Once approached, prospective participants are provided with information explaining the purpose of the research, the voluntary nature of participation, measures of confidentiality, and their right to withdraw at any time.

Verbal and written consent is obtained from each participant. Because participants were minors, parental consent was initially planned but could not be collected due to institutional constraints. These limitations are recognized, and efforts are made to maintain ethical integrity by ensuring participants' understanding and voluntary engagement.

To ensure diversity, the final sample consisted of three students representing different majors, namely Nursing, Engineering and Motorcycle Business (TBSM), and Visual Communication Design (DKV) and gender variation (one female, two male). Pseudonyms (Mimi, Bubu, and Kevin) were assigned to maintain anonymity.

Data Collection Procedure

Data was collected between February and May 2025 for Mimi and Bubu, and extended to June 2025 for Kevin, using a combination of offline, online, and phone-based formats to accommodate participants' schedules and mobility. Each participant completed three interview sessions, each lasting about 45-75 minutes, conducted in a setting that was comfortable and convenient for them. Draw and tell activities are integrated into the second or third session, depending on the availability and readiness of the participants.

Data collection lasted for four months and was done flexibly to fit the daily routine and comfort level of the participants.

Mimi (Department of Nursing) participated in three sessions:

1. February 10, 2025 was held offline at the participants' homes, with a focus on the introduction and anxiety of UKK, its causes and how to overcome it.
2. February 28, 2025, conducted online by phone while Mimi is out of town, this session focuses on anxiety that begins to decrease and factors that increase confidence.
3. March 6, 2025 was held offline at the participants' homes, with a focus on visualizing the feelings and readiness of UKK.

Bubu (Department of Motorcycle Engineering and Business/TBSM) participated in three sessions:

1. April 21, 2025, conducted by phone, with a focus on introductions, anxiety ahead of UKK, and how to manage their anxiety.
2. April 22, 2025 was held offline in an open public space near the Mahakam River, with a focus on UKK preparation, support from the school environment and friends, and anxiety that is still felt.
3. May 9, 2025, was held offline at the participants' homes, concentrating on visualizing feelings and changes in feelings after facing UKK.

Kevin (Department of Visual Communication Design/DKV) participated in three sessions:

1. April 14, 2025, conducted offline at school, introduction and exploration of initial anxiety related to UKK and the support received.
2. April 20, 2025, was carried out online via chat, discussing the development of anxiety, UKK readiness, and social support that affected his enthusiasm.
3. June 25, 2025, conducted offline at a local coffee shop, focusing on visual reflection of anxiety as well as emotional changes after anxiety subsides.

Each session begins with building relationships and informal conversations to create a relaxed environment, followed by semi-structured interview questions. All sessions are audio-recorded (or documented through written notes in a chat-based session) with the participant's permission.

In addition to the interview, participants completed two drawing and storytelling tasks that described their emotions before and after UKK. This visual narrative provides complementary data for verbal descriptions, helping to reveal affective dimensions that may not be easily expressed through words alone.

Before each session, participants are reminded of their rights, and informed consent is reaffirmed. Confidentiality is ensured during the process by using pseudonyms and secure data storage.

Research Instruments

Two main qualitative instruments were used: semi-structured in-depth interviews and drawing and storytelling techniques. The interviews are designed with open-ended questions that encourage participants to describe their experiences before, during, and after UKK. The flexibility in the questions allows the researcher to dig deeper into the themes that emerge.

The draw and tell method is used to access an emotional dimension that may be difficult to express verbally. Each participant was asked to create two pictures, one depicting how they felt before UKK and the other after UKK and explaining the meaning of the images, colors, and symbols they used. This technique provides visual data that complements the narrative interview, helping to uncover the participants' symbolic and affective expressions.

Table 2. Research Instrument Grid

Aspects Learned	Indicators/Components	Sample Questions
Emergencies faced by UKK	Internal sources (self-doubt, unpreparedness), external (parental pressure, raters)	"What makes you feel anxious in front of UKK?"
Impact of anxiety	Effects on daily activities, concentration, emotions	"How does anxiety affect your daily life?"
Coping and resilience strategies	Adaptive behavior, social support, motivation	"What are you doing to reduce or manage your anxiety?"
Emotional expression	Feelings before and after UKK as expressed visually	"Can you describe your picture and what it means to you?"

The instrument grid was developed from the theoretical dimension of anxiety testing (Afiffah, 2023; Lestari & Budiyo, 2023) and academic resilience (Dewinda et al., 2024; Salim & Fakhurrozi, 2020), refined through discussions with the research supervisor to ensure alignment with the research objectives.

Data Analysis

The data were analyzed using a thematic analysis approach according to Braun & Clarke (2006), as applied by (Simamora & Kadiyono, 2021). The steps include: 1) Data familiarization through repeated transcript reading and recording of initial ideas; 2) Initial coding to mark data units relevant to anxiety, coping, and resilience; 3) Grouping the code into the initial theme; 4) Review themes to ensure they fit into the overall data; 5) Define and name themes so that the focus of the meaning is clear; 6) Compile a results report that displays the theme along with supporting quotes.

For the draw and tell data, each image is described in detail (colors, symbols, images, and textual elements) in addition to the participants' verbal explanations. Visual elements that represent emotional states such as color contrast, facial expressions, and symbols of tension or success are encoded and associated with the textual themes of the interview. The integration of visual and verbal data allowed researchers to build a comprehensive interpretation of each participant's emotional journey from pre-UKK anxiety to post-UKK relief.

To improve analytical rigor, researchers kept analytical memos throughout the process, documenting reflections that informed the development of the theme.

Beliefs and Ethical Considerations

To ensure credibility and trust, data triangulation is implemented by combining interviews and draw and tell data. Researchers engaged in ongoing peer debriefing sessions with the research supervisor to minimize subjective bias during coding and interpretation. Although member checks were not conducted systematically due to time constraints, participants were informally asked to confirm key points during follow-up sessions. This limitation is acknowledged in the discussion section.

Ethical considerations were maintained during the study. Participation is voluntary, and data confidentiality is strictly maintained. Pseudonyms are used in all transcripts and reports. Although parental consent is not formally collected, participant consent is obtained, and the study procedure follows general ethical standards for qualitative educational research.

Result

The analysis produced four main themes that describe the emotional dynamics and behavior of students in facing the Vocational Competency Test (UKK): (1) the form and source of anxiety, (2) emotional expression through images, (3) the impact of anxiety on daily functioning, and (4) coping and resilience strategies.

Forms and Sources of Anxiety Related to UKK

All participants experienced anxiety before UKK, but with varying intensity and causes. Internal factors include self-doubt, technical unpreparedness, and fear of failure, while external factors involve parental pressure, negative stories from seniors, and concerns about rigorous judgment.

Mimi (Nursing) revealed strong internal anxiety, saying she doubted her abilities and was afraid of disappointing her parents. Kevin (DKV) reported anxiety about the technical difficulties of using *Adobe Premiere* and verbal pressure from his mother: *"Mama said if you don't pass UKK, you don't have to go to school, it's a shame."* Bubu (TBSM) initially felt relaxed but became anxious after hearing stories from seniors about how difficult the exam was. This record shows that self-perception and external expectations together form anxiety related to UKK.

Emotional Expression Through Draw and Tell

The draw and tell activity revealed symbolic emotional shifts before and after UKK. Before the exam, participants used dark or muted tones, tense expressions, and thought bubbles expressing concern, after the exam, their images contained bright colors, nature symbols, and positive statements.

Mimi portrays her emotions through two emoji images. Before UKK, she drew a red emoji with her eyes and mouth down to symbolize panic, tension, and uncertainty. After UKK, she drew a bright yellow smiling emoji that expressed joy and calm.

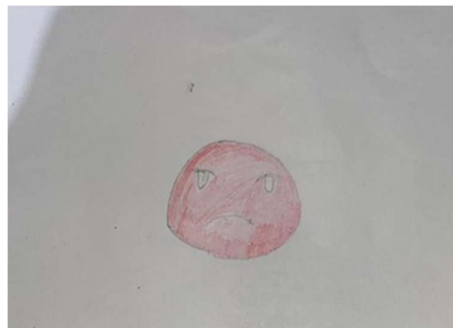


Figure 1. Picture and Tell Mimi Before UKK

The red emoji with a sullen expression represents surprise, panic, and self-doubt before the exam.



Figure 2. Picture and Tell Mimi's After UKK

The yellow smiling emoji reflects optimism, gratitude, and emotional relief after completing the test.

Bubu uses the style of a stick figure to describe his anxious thoughts. The image "Before UKK" shows a thought bubble filled with concerns such as *"Am I doing it right?"* and *"What if I fail?"* The imagery of "After UKK" transforms into a sunny outdoor landscape with trees, flowers, houses, and text bubbles that express serenity and pride (*"I can sleep well now," "I graduated UKK"*).

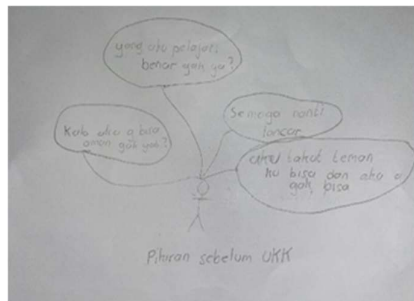


Figure 3. Bubu's Draw and Tell Before UKK

The image contains an anxious internal dialogue that symbolizes cognitive tension and self-doubt before the exam.

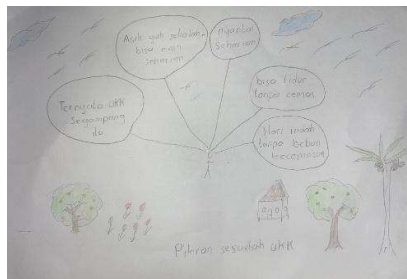


Figure 4. Bubu Draw and Tell After UKK

The colorful surroundings with trees and sky represent emotional relief, calm, and gratitude after judgment.

Kevin conveys a deeper symbolic meaning through more detailed images. Before UKK, he drew himself surrounded by pointing hands and the words *"What do you want!"* ("What are you going to do!"), shows the pressure of parents and a strong society. After UKK, the image shows him smiling, holding a certificate, with words like *"Pass UKK"*, *"I can"*, and visual symbols of achievement such as graduation medals and hats.



Figure 5. Picture and Tell Kevin Before UKK

The image depicts external pressure through fingerpointing and confrontation with the text, representing the fear of judgment.



Figure 6. Picture and Tell Kevin After UKK

This image features bright tones, confident smiles, and symbols of success such as certificates and medals, visualizing pride and achievement.

The overall visual transformation from tense and colorless to bright and open depicts an emotional trajectory from anxiety to renewed relief and confidence. The *draw and tell* method manages to reveal internal emotional transitions that may not be captured by verbal interviews alone.

Impact of Anxiety on Daily Functioning

Anxiety before UKK affects concentration, sleep, and motivation. Mimi reported difficulty enjoying her free time, Bubu sometimes had trouble sleeping, and Kevin felt restless and less creative. This effect suggests that test anxiety goes beyond academics and affects psychosocial well-being, in line with (Anser et al., 2021; Wulandari & Lestari, 2022).

Coping and Resilience Strategy

All participants demonstrated resilience through adaptive coping: (1) exercise and repetition, (2) positive self-talk, (3) emotional regulation through fun activities, and (4) social support. The inclusion of smiling faces, open skies, and encouraging phrases in their post-exam images symbolizes mastery and relief. Collectively, resilience emerges as a dynamic process that combines effort, belief, and social relationships.

Overall, the results of the study show that UKK-related anxiety among vocational students is multidimensional formed by internal fears and external expectations but can be converted into motivation and growth through resilience. The *draw and tell* method effectively visualizes a student's emotional transformation from tension to relief.

Discussion

This study aims to understand the dynamics of anxiety and exam resilience among vocational students who face the Expertise Competency Test (UKK) through a case study of double exploration using the draw and tell method. This discussion integrates four key findings on the forms and sources of anxiety, emotional expression, the impact of anxiety, and the process of coping resistance by comparing them with previous research and relevant theoretical perspectives.

Forms and Sources of Anxiety Related to UKK

The findings show that anxiety before UKK arises from both internal and external factors. Internal factors include self-doubt, fear of failure, and technical unpreparedness, while external pressures come from parental expectations, social comparisons, and fear of evaluators. These results are in line with (Larasati et al., 2022; Su et al., 2023), which identified self-efficacy and perceived competence as the primary predictors of test anxiety among vocational students. Similarly (Lestari & Budiyo, 2023) Highlight that students' beliefs about their abilities greatly affect emotional stability before high-risk assessments.

However, this study contributes new insights by showing how social narratives such as stories from seniors or peers reinforce anxiety even before formal assessments begin. This pattern of anticipatory anxiety, which Double (2025) The term pre-assessment of fear conditioning, suggests that vocational test anxiety is not only internal but also socially constructed through collective discourse. In this context, student anxiety is a product of performance pressure and interpersonal influence in the school environment.

Emotional Expression Through Draw and Tell

The use of draw and tell reveals an emotional trajectory that may not be fully captured by verbal interviews alone. Visual analysis showed a clear transition from dark, closed, and tense imagery before UKK to a bright, open, and positive composition afterwards. Mimi's transformation of red to yellow emoji represents a shift from panic to calm confidence, Bubu's evolution from an anxious bubble of mind to a peaceful natural landscape reflecting cognitive relaxation, and Kevin's progression from a judgmental finger-pointing to a self-esteem and a symbol of achievement illustrates empowerment.

This visual shift supports Salim & Fakhurrozi (2020) The theory that emotional regulation is a core component of resilience. These findings are also in line with Goodwin et al. (2023), who found that creative expression methods allow adolescents to externalize complex emotions and reconstruct meaning after stressful events. In this study, color, composition, and symbolic representation became nonverbal evidence of emotional recovery, supporting the interpretation of resilience as a transformative emotional process rather than a fixed personality trait.

Impact of Anxiety on Daily Functioning

Consistent with previous research Trigueros et al. (2020) and Wulandari & Lestari (2022), students report that anxiety before UKK interferes with their concentration, sleep, and enjoyment of their recreational activities. However, the data also revealed that anxiety does not lead to dismissal but often coexists with motivation. Bubu and Kevin, for example, use their anxiety as a source of motivation to train more intensely. It supports Dewinda et al. (2024), which argues that mild to moderate anxiety can function as an adaptive force when accompanied by clarity of purpose and self-efficacy.

These findings thus expand the interpretation of test anxiety beyond its negative connotations, showing it as a dynamic state that can shift from stress to constructive motivation. In the context of vocational education, where practical competence is central, such anxiety can even serve as an emotional preparation mechanism.

Coping and Resilience Strategy

Participants demonstrated resilience through four interrelated coping strategies: (1) repetitive practice to improve mastery, (2) self-affirmation and religious coping skills, (3) emotional regulation through fun activities, and (4) social support from peers and teachers. These patterns resonate with Irawan et al. (2022), which found that effective resilience combines problem-focused and emotion-focused strategies.

Social support plays a very significant role. Encouragement from teachers and peers helped participants reinterpret anxiety as normal shared experiences rather than personal failures. This reflects Almun & Ash-Shiddiqy (2022) The findings that peer connections strengthen adaptive function during stress. In addition, the participants' participation in prayer and gratitude resonated Candrakanti & Chusairi (2022), which identifies spiritual coping as a predictor of emotional resilience among adolescents.

The draw and tell results visually reinforce this coping mechanism. Post-exam drawing clear skies, smiling faces, symbols of success serve as a visual narrative of resilience, depicting what research calls a visual resilience trajectory: an observable transformation from emotional tension to positive reconstruction (Purnama et al., 2020). This concept is in line with the idea that resilience is both behavioral and symbolic, emerging through actions of emotional reframing and repetitive creative expression.

Theoretical and Practical Implications

Theoretically, this research expands the existing academic resilience framework by integrating expressive and symbolic elements into the coping process. It highlights how affective representations, such as drawing, can bridge the cognitive and emotional aspects of resilience in adolescents. The study also supports a multidimensional view of anxiety, positioning it as a fluid emotional state shaped by internal control and environmental context (Aini et al., 2022).

In practical terms, these findings suggest that schools should incorporate creative expression interventions such as art-based counseling, reflective drawing, or journaling into pre-exam preparation. These activities can help students externalize negative emotions, foster emotional awareness, and strengthen self-efficacy. Guidance counselors and teachers

are encouraged to create a psychologically safe environment, where students can express fear without stigma, turning anxiety into motivation and resilience.

Limitations and Directions for Future Research

The study was limited by its small sample size and lack of formal parental consent, limiting generalization. The absence of systematic member checks also limits interpretation verification. Future research should expand the pool of participants across regions and departments, adopt mixed-methods designs, and include longitudinal follow-up to track resilience development over time. Integrating physiological indicators, such as heart rate or cortisol levels, can also provide deeper insights into the interactions between emotional and biological stress responses.

Overall, the findings show that UKK-related anxiety among vocational students is not only an obstacle but also a development opportunity. Through resilience, creative expression, and social support, students can turn anxiety into a narrative of strength, illustrating that emotional adaptation is an essential component of vocational success.

Conclusion

This study explores the experiences of vocational school students in managing anxiety ahead of the Vocational Competency Exam (UKK) and examines how resilience supports emotional adaptation through the draw and tell method. The findings revealed that anxiety before UKK was influenced by internal factors (self-doubt, technical unpreparedness, fear of failure) and external factors (parental pressure, peer comparison, and assessor expectations). Despite these challenges, participants demonstrated resilience through exercise, positive self-talk, emotional regulation, and social support from peers and teachers.

Illustrations of images and stories effectively visualize the emotional transformations that occur during the testing process. Before UKK, the participant's image contains tense colors, closed shapes, and symbols of fear, after UKK, the image shows a bright and open image with symbols of calmness, gratitude, and achievement. This visual transition reveals that anxiety, when managed adaptively, can be a medium for self-growth and emotional reinforcement. This study thus underscores the importance of resilience not only as a cognitive skill but also as an expressive and symbolic recovery process.

Theoretically, this research contributes to the understanding of academic resilience by integrating expressive and emotional dimensions into the coping model. This suggests that resilience is dynamic in nature that develops through reflection, creativity, and social connectedness and that visual expression can serve as a valid means of interpreting students' emotional regulation.

Practically, the findings emphasize the importance of preparing vocational students emotionally before major exams. Schools and counselors are encouraged to include art-based or expressive counseling sessions, group reflection, and peer support activities in the pre-exam program. Empathy and constructive feedback from teachers are also important in reducing fear of failure and strengthening student confidence.

The study acknowledges some limitations, such as the small number of participants, the absence of parental consent, and the limitations of generalization of qualitative data. Future

studies are recommended to involve a larger and more diverse sample, combine visual and quantitative measures, and explore how resilience evolves over time in a variety of educational contexts.

In conclusion, the experience of vocational students during UKK shows that anxiety is not purely negative but can be a cornerstone for growth. Through resilience, reflection, and creative expression, students transform emotional tension into a renewed sense of competence and confidence, psychological readiness essential for academic and professional success.

Author's Contributions

Jubaidah compiles research, designs research procedures, collects and analyzes data, and writes manuscripts. Andi Wahyu Irawan supervised the research process, provided critical feedback, and approved the final version of the manuscript.

Declaration of Conflict of Interest

The author declares that there is no potential conflict of interest with respect to the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

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