An Examination of Pre-Exam Rituals in Higher Education within the Context of Folklore: The Case of ÇOMU

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Abstract

Aim. The aim of this study is to examine pre-examination ritual practices among students at Çanakkale Onsekiz Mart University (COMU) within the framework of contemporary folklore studies. It explores how belief-oriented and ritualised behaviour persists, transforms and acquires new functions within modern higher education contexts shaped by institutional and digital structures.

Methods. The study is grounded in folklore theory, ritual studies and everyday life approaches and adopts a qualitative research design. Data were collected through face-to-face semi-structured interviews with 23 undergraduate students from ten different faculties and vocational schools at ÇOMU, representing 15 academic programmes. The data was analysed thematically to identify recurring patterns, symbolic meanings and functional aspects of pre-examination practices.

Results. The findings show that students engage in various ritual practices prior to examinations. These include object-centred routines, bodily behaviour and belief-based actions such as praying or carrying items attributed with symbolic meaning. Alongside individual practices, collective rituals — such as peer interaction, shared silence, humour and emotional regulation — play an important role in the pre-examination period. Digital platforms also operate as extended ritual spaces where motivational narratives and symbolic expressions circulate.

Conclusions. The study concludes that folklore remains an active and adaptive cultural system within contemporary university life. Pre-examination rituals function as culturally embedded strategies for coping with uncertainty, managing anxiety and reinforcing group cohesion. By conceptualising examination-related practices

as modern folkloric expressions, the study contributes to international discussions on ritual, belief and everyday culture in higher education.
Keywords: Exam, ritual, folklore, ÇOMU

Introduction

Examinations constitute one of the most significant evaluative experiences in educational life. Beyond measuring academic achievement, they often generate uncertainty, psychological pressure, and emotional stress for students. In response to these challenges, many students develop repetitive and symbolically meaningful practices before examinations, believing that these behaviours may enhance confidence, alleviate anxiety, or improve performance. Although such practices are widespread in everyday student life, they can also be understood as ritual behaviours that embody cultural meanings and reflect shared traditions.

A substantial body of the existing literature has focused on the relationship between test anxiety and academic achievement (Kavakcı et al., 2011; Acar et al., 2022; Dereli & Acat, 2011; Doğan, 2020; Ross et al., 1999). In contrast, studies examining pre-examination ritual practices as a folkloric phenomenon remain relatively scarce. Consequently, the cultural meanings, functions, and processes of transmission associated with examination rituals have received limited scholarly attention. This gap highlights the need to conceptualise examination rituals within the broader theoretical framework of ritual studies before exploring their folkloric dimensions.

The concept of ritual has been approached from diverse disciplinary perspectives and defined in various ways. In its broadest sense, ritual refers to patterns of behaviour that are formalised through established rules, repeated over time, and invested with symbolic meaning (Türk Dil Kurumu, 2023). Within this framework, the prayers, rites, and ceremonies performed by members of a community or religious group at specific intervals according to prescribed conventions are considered rituals (Öztürk, 2009). However, ritual is not confined to religious contexts alone. Ritual practices permeate virtually every sphere of social life, where they contribute to the construction of meaning, reinforce social cohesion, and provide individuals with a sense of order and continuity.

In the context of education, rituals can be categorised according to both space and time. Spatially, they may be classified as in-class or out-of-class rituals; temporally, they may be daily, weekly/monthly, or annual rituals. For instance, students lining up in the schoolyard every morning or at noon, participating in the national anthem ceremony at the beginning and end of the week, or standing up when the teacher enters the classroom are examples of such practices (Alğan, 2014). These regular and repeated activities not only serve to maintain school discipline but also function as symbolic processes that direct participants' attention to emotions and ideas attributed with special significance (Connerton, 1999). Thus, rituals in educational settings operate as cultural practices that simultaneously uphold social order and reinforce a sense of belonging.

Within this framework, exam anxiety can be understood in modern educational settings not only as a psychological condition but also as a cultural phenomenon. Exam anxiety is a widely observed experience among students and can negatively impact academic performance. From a folkloristic perspective, however, the individual or collective strategies developed to cope with exam anxiety constitute distinctive ritual domains of the modern era. Students, prior to examinations, do more than engage in cognitive preparation; they also create specific behavioural patterns aimed at reducing anxiety, enhancing motivation, and strengthening psychological resilience. Such behaviour as, using a "lucky" pen, drinking coffee on the morning of the exam, engaging in short motivational conversations with peers, or reciting prayers, not only fulfill functional purposes but also become part of a broader cultural process that gives meaning to the exam. In this way, the exam transcends its role as a mere academic assessment and transforms into a "modern rite of passage" embedded in both social and individual spheres of meaning.

Methodology

This study was designed within the framework of a qualitative research approach to examine the pre-exam rituals of students at Çanakkale Onsekiz Mart University (ÇOMU). A multi-layered and rich dataset was obtained by employing a combination of in-depth interviews, participant observation, and focus group discussions. This methodological diversity enabled the evaluation of students' pre-exam experiences not only in terms of individual practices but also through collective cultural codes and social memory.

This study was designed within the framework of a qualitative research approach to examine the pre-exam rituals of students at Çanakkale Onsekiz Mart University (ÇOMU). Data were collected through face-to-face semi-structured interviews, allowing participants to describe their pre-exam experiences, beliefs, and ritual practices in detail. This approach enabled an in-depth exploration of the cultural meanings and symbolic dimensions associated with students' pre-exam rituals.

The research was conducted with a total of 23 students enrolled in different faculties and vocational schools of ÇOMU. Participants were selected using a maximum variation sampling strategy, taking into account variables such as faculty and school diversity, age, gender, and field of study. This approach made it possible to explore how exam rituals are shaped across different socio-cultural and academic contexts. To ensure confidentiality, each participant was assigned an anonymous code (e.g., P-1, P-2, P-3), which was used consistently when reporting empirical data.

Data collection was carried out through folkloristic fieldwork methods. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with all participants, each lasting approximately 60–90 minutes. The interviews focused on students' pre-exam rituals, the individual

and cultural foundations of these rituals, and their impact on exam anxiety. All interviews were audio-recorded with the informed consent of participants and subsequently transcribed. In addition to the interviews, students' pre-exam practices were directly observed, and these observations were supported with detailed field notes. Furthermore, small-scale focus group discussions were organised with some participants, providing further insights into the collective dimensions of the rituals.

The collected data were analysed using an inductive thematic analysis. The coding process was carried out by the author through an iterative coding procedure involving repeated reading, constant comparison of the data, and continuous refinement of codes and themes to ensure analytical consistency and credibility. Inter-coder reliability was assessed by calculating Cohen's Kappa coefficient on a randomly selected 40% of the interview transcripts. The resulting Kappa value of 0.89 indicated a high level of agreement between researchers (Landis & Koch, 1977) and confirmed the reliability of the coding process. Minor discrepancies were resolved through joint discussions, and the final themes were determined through analytical consensus.

This methodological framework allowed for the evaluation of ÇOMU students' pre-exam rituals in relation to both individual psychology and collective cultural dynamics. The findings demonstrate that students' pre-exam practices were sometimes performed consciously and at other times unconsciously, yet consistently functioned not only as strategies for academic success but also as means of alleviating anxiety, reinforcing a sense of security, and establishing a symbolic sphere of control.

Pre-Exam Rituals and Preparatory Practices

Examinations, beyond being indispensable instruments of assessment in modern education, are also cultural experiences that leave profound marks on students' intellectual, emotional, and social worlds. Particularly at the level of higher education, the preparation process for examinations is not limited to the acquisition and consolidation of knowledge; it is interwoven with ritualised behaviour and habits of high symbolic value that generate meaning on both individual and collective levels. From a folkloristic perspective, such rituals are noteworthy as they reveal the new forms that cultural continuity assumes in modern contexts. The pre-exam practices of Çanakkale Onsekiz Mart University (ÇOMU) students demonstrate a coexistence of traditions rooted in folk belief and practices responding to personal psychological needs. This convergence transforms the examination from a mere academic assessment tool into a symbolic "liminal space," Victor Turner (2018) functioning as a ritual arena produced by modern society in which both individual and collective status transitions are negotiated.

Rites of passage (*les rites de passage*) are traditional or religious ceremonies, governed by established rules, that regulate an individual's transition across social or personal boundaries and mark changes in social status (Ozan, 2011). According to Arnold

van Gennep's (2005) theoretical framework, such rites unfold in three sequential stages: separation, transition, and incorporation. The separation phase signifies departure from a previous status, the transition phase represents a period of uncertainty, testing, and preparation, and the incorporation phase marks reintegration into society with a newly acquired status. While this framework has traditionally been applied to life-cycle events such as birth, circumcision, military service, marriage, and death, it also provides a useful conceptual lens for understanding contemporary social experiences.

Building upon Van Gennep's model, Turner (2018) conceptualised the transitional stage as a liminal phase in which individuals exist "betwixt and between" established social positions. From this perspective, examinations may be understood as liminal situations in which students temporarily occupy an ambiguous position between preparation and evaluation. Such transitional conditions provide a context in which ritualised behaviours emerge and acquire symbolic significance (Turner, 2018). Accordingly, the examination process can be interpreted as a modern rite of passage, in which success or failure signifies a symbolic transformation in social and academic status. In this sense, examinations function not only as instruments for measuring academic performance but also as culturally meaningful transitional experiences that generate ritual practices. For folklore studies, this perspective demonstrates that the functions of traditional rites of passage continue in contemporary society through newly emerging ritual forms.

Within this theoretical framework, the examination process can be understood through Van Gennep's three-stage model. The separation stage corresponds to the preparatory process before the examination; the transition stage is embodied in the moments immediately before and during the examination; and the incorporation stage occurs once the examination is completed and the results are announced. Students participate in these stages not only cognitively but also emotionally, symbolically, and culturally, making the examination a ritual process through which they negotiate uncertainty, undergo symbolic transformation, and are reintegrated into the social structure with a new academic status.

At ÇOMU, students' pre-exam preparations, while exhibiting individual variations, converge around shared rituals and habits that give cultural and psychological meaning to the exam. Some students engage in specific behaviour to feel spiritually and physically ready before beginning to study. For instance, one participant noted that spraying perfume before starting study sessions (P-1) served as a "signal of initiation." Through such practices, mundane actions acquire symbolic meaning and are transformed into ritualised routines. The conversion of an everyday act such as applying perfume into a "starting signal" illustrates a common folkloric phenomenon: the ritualisation of ordinary behaviour.

Physical and psychological preparation constitutes a central element of pre-exam rituals. Taking a walk outdoors, strolling along the seaside, or engaging with nature (Şeftalici, 2017) are practices employed to refresh the mind and alleviate exam-related anxiety. Similarly, drinking coffee, particularly Turkish coffee, on the morning

of the exam is perceived not only as a practical stimulant enhancing mental alertness but also as a symbolic ritual unique to the exam day (P-4, P-3). Some students also preferred drinking cola for mental stimulation (P-1). Such habits, associated with previous positive experiences, gradually become "luck-bringing practices." The cultural connotations of coffee in Turkish tradition, linked to memory, conversation, and social ties, add further depth to its consumption on exam mornings, rendering it both biological and symbolic in function.

Lucky objects are among the most frequently utilised symbolic tools in exam rituals. Wearing an anklet or repeatedly using the same pen in examinations for years (P-4) are not merely practical choices but personal talismans that provide confidence, continuity, and a sense of fortune. These objects act as reminders of past achievements and serve as psychological resources for resilience. Within folk belief, such objects function analogously to amulets or charms. In the modern context, the "lucky pen" or "lucky accessory" can be interpreted as updated versions of traditional protective objects.

Academic preparation strategies also become ritualised. Reviewing topics and taking notes, identifying gaps for revision, summarising course materials, creating worksheets under thematic headings, and systematically revisiting them are common practices (P-5, P-6). Some students enter exams with only their "lucky pen," thereby transforming a functional act into a personal belief practice. Waking up early to study, briefly reviewing notes the night before, or deliberately disconnecting from digital devices to sleep all represent behaviour ritualised as preparatory thresholds to the exam. In this way, even academic activities themselves are ritualised, intertwining functionality with symbolism.

Belief-based practices constitute one of the strongest dimensions of this process. Some students consume "blessed rice" or "blessed water" before or during exams (Şeftalici, 2017). Such items, rice, salt, sugar imbued with prayer, or talismans and sacred inscriptions, represent modern extensions of "contagious magic" in folk belief (Frazer, 1890). Drinking blessed water serves both as spiritual support and as a means of invoking luck (P-4, P-7). Certain students recited specific verses such as Ayat al-Kursi before entering the exam hall, praying "May my exam flow like water" while washing their hands, or beginning the exam by reciting Fatiha and three Ikhlas followed by *bismillah* (P-20). Such practices demonstrate the strong persistence of oral tradition and religious rituals even within modern academic contexts. The presence of religious and magical elements in a secular sphere such as the university exam process underscores the enduring continuity of folk belief and the visible search for spiritual power among students.

These examples collectively illustrate that pre-exam preparation is not solely a cognitive undertaking; rather, it is a multi-layered experiential field shaped by emotional, physical, and belief-based dimensions. Through these rituals and habits, students not only seek academic success but also attempt to cope with stress, reinforce a sense of control, and situate the exam within a broader cultural framework. Consequently,

examinations transcend individual academic experiences to become collective practices interwoven with cultural codes and meanings. In this sense, the exam functions as one of modern society's most significant "rites of passage," serving as a symbolic space in which individuals reconstruct their cultural identities and re-enter the social order with newly conferred status.

Ritualised Behaviour Repeated in the Days and Hours Before the Exam

The behaviour repeated by higher education students in the days and hours leading up to an examination can be understood not merely as individual habits but also as meaningful, symbolic, and ritualised practices. These behavioural patterns demonstrate that examinations function as more than purely academic instruments of assessment; for students, they represent a special process that carries functions of mental preparation, psychological reassurance, bodily balance, and cultural belonging. From a folkloristic perspective, these rituals reveal, on the one hand, the continuity of traditional beliefs and practices in modern contexts, and on the other, the ways in which individuals create symbolic domains of control in the face of stress-laden situations such as exams. Testimonies of Çanakkale Onsekiz Mart University (ÇOMU) students make clear that pre-exam preparation transcends everyday routines and becomes a "liminal space" Turner (2018) imbued with cultural and emotional meaning.

The habits repeated in the days or hours before an exam point to ritualised behavioural patterns that extend beyond individual strategies of focus. These practices are not only part of preparation but also acquire significance by facilitating mental transition, providing psychological comfort, establishing bodily equilibrium, and constructing symbolic security. For example, applying cologne or consuming a sweet food item (particularly chocolate) before the exam are interpreted by students as small yet effective rituals ensuring both bodily and spiritual relaxation (P-8). In Turkish folk culture, cologne is associated with "purification," freshness, and cleanliness, while sweets are linked with joy, prosperity, and good fortune. Thus, such choices exemplify the reconfiguration of traditional folk beliefs in modern contexts. From a folkloristic perspective, these practices represent contemporary forms of belief in protection, purification, and luck.

Sleep regulation also constitutes an important aspect of pre-exam rituals. Some students reported that they studied more efficiently at night, choosing to sleep in the early evening and wake after midnight to continue their work (P-9), while others emphasised maintaining regular sleep in order to internalise knowledge through rest (P-10). These two approaches reflect what can be described in folkloristics as "personal ritual diversification." While P-9's nocturnal study routine ritualises personal experience, P-10's insistence on regular sleep represents a ritual pattern centred on bodily balance. Both demonstrate efforts to symbolically construct a sense of control. Some students

preferred light review the day before to avoid overexertion, whereas others habitually revisited all of their accumulated notes (P-10). Such variations show how individual learning styles become ritualised cultural habits and reflect a symbolic "search for balance" in the period leading up to exams.

Prayer and the search for spiritual support also hold a prominent place in students' rituals. Some requested prayers from their mothers before exams (P-9), a practice that reflects the continuation of familial spiritual transmission and communal bonds in a modern context. Maternal prayers are one of the most widespread forms of protective power in folk culture. Other students sought cognitive reinforcement by repeating information aloud or rewriting notes. The act of taking notes and reviewing them at specific times functions both as a systematic method of learning and as a ritualised practice centred on repetition (P-11, P-23). In this sense, these practices transform studying into a form of "magical repetition," a folkloric principle that remains evident even in modern learning processes.

Music emerges as another ritual element that enhances concentration and stabilises mood. Listening to particular songs during exam week and then repeating the same tracks on the morning of the exam functions as a form of "mental anchoring." Engaging in activities such as drinking coffee, taking notes, or revising while listening to "white noise," "lofi beats," or "Studio Ghibli" soundtracks is not merely a study method but also a personalised ritual that signals focus (P-8). This example illustrates the cultural continuity of ritual in modern technological contexts (Spotify, YouTube, etc.). Just as hymns, folk songs, or manis once functioned at specific times in oral tradition, today's students experience similar effects through digital music.

Pre-exam preparation is not limited to the individual level but also takes collective forms. Some students gathered with peers to exchange knowledge, rehearse materials by explaining them to one another, and evaluate such social interaction as both reinforcement and emotional support (P-4, P-5). These practices may be seen as modern academic equivalents of the *imece* tradition in Turkish folklore, transforming exams from individual experiences into communal acts of solidarity. The use of protective or lucky objects is another noteworthy ritual element. Students who always wore specific necklaces or bracelets before exams attributed to them symbolic meanings of fortune or spiritual protection (P-1, P-22). Such practices mirror the function of amulets or talismans in folk culture. In the modern context, accessories fulfill the same purpose by providing a symbolic domain of safety for students.

Overall, students' pre-exam preparation processes are organised around elements such as prayer, symbolic objects, music, scent, food, social interaction, and bodily rest. These practices are not solely behavioural strategies aimed at academic achievement but also rituals embedded in everyday modern life that render the exam experience akin to a rite of passage. From a folkloristic standpoint, these recurring practices hold special significance as they demonstrate how examinations in the modern world are transformed into cultural "rites of passage" interwoven with symbolic codes. Ultimate-

ly, students' experiences illustrate that strategies to overcome psychological anxiety are simultaneously symbolic strategies of cultural continuity.

For higher education students, organising the study environment prior to an exam is not merely a practical stage of preparation; it also constitutes an indispensable process of mental concentration, psychological relaxation, and symbolic meaning-making. Observations of students' practices in this context reveal that the influence of physical space on exam performance extends beyond its functional dimension and largely derives meaning from symbolic practices of a ritual nature. From a folkloristic perspective, behaviour of spatial organisation can be interpreted as spatial reflections of a cultural approach that frames the exam as a "threshold" or "rite of passage." Narratives from students at Çanakkale Onsekiz Mart University (ÇOMU) illustrate that preparing the study environment is not only about cleanliness and order but also about constructing a sense of control, security, and belonging.

A considerable number of participants reported that they meticulously arranged their rooms, and particularly their desks, before examinations (P-9, P-13, P-14). Such practices reflect the folkloric function of "spatial purification." The arrangement of the study desk is not only a way to eliminate distractions but also a ritual that symbolically prepares the individual for the exam. This act of tidying serves to prevent distraction, ensure mental clarity, and provide spatial comfort, thereby carrying both functional and symbolic dimensions. Restricting the desk to exam-related materials while removing other items becomes a preparatory ritual reinforcing mental focus (P-7, P-12). Their testimonies evoke parallels with the "threshold cleaning" practices in folk culture, demonstrating that the awareness of the exam as a liminal process Turner (2018) is spatially embodied.

For some students, organisation goes beyond physical tidiness to include rewriting and aesthetically reorganising notes, which generates both cognitive clarity and a sense of order (P-13). This resembles the folkloric ritual of "restoring order." Here, cleanliness signifies both physical and mental clarity, while spatial organisation emerges as an indispensable element of exam preparation. Other participants stated that they engaged in such preparations only for particularly significant examinations (P-2). This indicates that the intensity of ritual practice is directly linked to the cultural attribution of importance, a phenomenon comparable to special preparations in folk tradition for significant days.

Students living in dormitories developed alternative strategies due to spatial limitations. In the absence of desks, participants reported preferring communal spaces such as libraries, choosing desks facing walls to minimise distractions (P-12). This choice reflects not only functional arrangement but also the symbolic need for protection. Folklorically, such an effort to "withdraw from distraction" corresponds to the ritual attempt to shield a liminal space Turner (2018) from external influences. This demonstrates that spatial preparation is not confined to the home environment but represents a broader ritualistic pursuit across diverse settings.

Spatial practices also extend into exam halls themselves. Some students competed to secure particular seats upon entering, often preferring middle or back rows rather than the front. These choices stem from various motivations: sitting in the front was associated with heightened surveillance and anxiety due to proximity to invigilators, while middle or back rows offered greater psychological comfort. Others associated back-row seating with a sense of "invisibility" that reduced exam stress, or based their preferences on physical conditions such as lighting, ventilation, and furniture. Some even regarded seating choices as opportunities for peer support or covert assistance. From a folkloristic standpoint, this demonstrates that space acquires not only functional but also symbolic significance. Selecting one's seat can thus be read as a practice of "choosing a lucky place" or "creating a protected space."

Preparation extended beyond physical space to personal appearance. For some, adorning themselves or selecting clean and comfortable clothing on the morning of the exam symbolised holistic readiness (P-3). This reflects the folkloric practice of choosing "ceremonial attire." Through clothing, individuals symbolically reconstruct themselves, approaching the exam as a performance space. In this sense, the exam is not only an academic event but also a social and psychological threshold experience.

Conversely, a minority of students described their rooms during exam periods as resembling a "battlefield," with some neglecting even basic chores such as washing dishes (P-2). This expression reveals that, in opposition to ritual order, a form of "ritualised chaos" can also emerge as a symbolic reflection of the exam. Folklorically, this underscores that ritual practice may vary significantly across individuals.

In conclusion, students' practices of arranging their study environments cannot be reduced to matters of personal preference or cleanliness alone. This behaviour functions as ritual acts grounded in attention, motivation, control, belief, and reassurance. They serve as cultural and psychological strategies for coping with uncertainty and stress inherent in examinations. In this regard, rituals of spatial preparation before exams constitute a rich field of observation for the folkloristic study of modern life.

Lucky Objects, Clothing, and Behavioural Rituals

The lucky objects, clothing, and behaviour employed before examinations represent concrete reflections of the symbolic strategies of protection and motivation that individuals develop in the face of uncertainty and stress. From a folkloristic perspective, such practices can be interpreted as modern adaptations of traditional belief categories such as "luck" (*uğur*), "talisman" (*tılsım*), "the evil eye" (*nazar*), and "personal totem." According to Pertev Naili Boratav (1999), luck is "the inherent goodness, happiness, abundance, ease, in short, the positive quality and power, of an object, a person, an animal, a time, or a place" (p. 123). Talismanic objects, by contrast, are special items believed to possess sacred power, used for protection from evil spirits, enemies, and illness, or for the purpose of healing; they are inscribed with words, symbols, signs, or figures (Çalışır, 1997, as cited in Karataş, 2023).

The concept of totem (Yakar, 1988) refers to an animal, plant, inanimate object, or natural phenomenon believed to have a religious-magical relationship with an individual or community, serving as its protector and sharing its destiny. In Turkish culture, the totemic worldview has existed since ancient times. The ritual garments and objects used by shamans are among the most concrete examples of totemic elements (Ögel, 2003). With the adoption of Islam, this worldview transformed into new forms through protective objects such as amulets (*nazar boncuğu*) and prayer scrolls (*muska*) (Çalışır, 1997, as cited in Karataş, 2023).

The primary function of lucky objects is to bring fortune and happiness. They are believed to facilitate success when undertaking a task or facing challenges and to carry luck into everyday life (Karataş, 2023). Thus, ordinary objects may acquire "magical" meanings for certain individuals, serving as sources of psychological security and motivation. In anxiety-laden contexts such as examinations, these practices become not only tools for improving performance but also cultural codes that provide a sense of control, confidence, and resilience. Testimonies collected from ÇOMU students show how such personal rituals, shaped through both material objects and particular behavioural patterns, create a strong bridge between individual experience and collective cultural heritage.

When students' attitudes toward exams are examined, many appear to rely on certain objects, clothing, or behaviour believed to influence success. These practices are directly related to the folkloric concepts of luck, talisman, evil eye, and personal totem. One of the most common practices is the repeated use of a specific pen during exams (P-12, P-16). This example shows how an everyday item is transformed into a "personal totem" within the exam context. The pen functions not merely as a writing instrument but as a symbolic carrier of past achievements, akin to a modern form of the amulet. Similarly, a coin, necklace, bracelet, watch, plush toy, or even cologne gifted by a friend may serve as personal symbols of luck (P-9). Here, the gifted object symbolises not only material but also social bonds. This reflects the extension of emotional and spiritual value associated with gifts into the realm of exam rituals. Such items provide psychological comfort, a sense of control, and familiarity, thereby making the exam process more bearable.

Some students also link physical spaces to luck. For example, participants who believed that taking an exam in a particular classroom brought success (P-1) reveal how spatial memory is imbued with symbolic value. P-1's account suggests that the classroom becomes a "lucky space," much like sacred sites in folk belief. Similarly, changing one's study desk after a failed exam (P-17) illustrates an attempt to ritually reconstruct the physical environment in association with success, akin to traditional rituals of warding off misfortune.

Other students reported carrying a red object, applying cologne, or drinking blessed water on exam mornings (P-4, P-9). In Turkish folk culture, the colour red is linked to protection and vitality, cologne to purification, and blessed water to spiritual empowerment. These practices demonstrate how traditional belief categories are carried into exam rituals in modern forms. They align with folkloric functions of warding off

the evil eye, enhancing clarity of mind, and invoking good fortune, while symbolising attempts to establish control over unpredictable circumstances.

At the behavioural level, common practices included ensuring punctual arrival, reciting specific prayers, or wearing a watch during the exam to manage time (P-18). Such acts are not only functional but also ritualised strategies of security. For instance, wearing a watch symbolises both the effort to monitor time and the reassurance of control. Similarly, one participant reported always entering the exam hall with the right foot (P-22). Believing that stepping in with the right foot ensures success while stepping in with the left brings failure, the student created a personal ritual of luck. This reflects the reproduction of symbolic meanings attached to the right-left dichotomy in Turkish folk culture within modern life.

Conversely, some students expressed disbelief in luck-related practices, attributing success solely to hard work and concentration (P-19). Yet, their choices, such as wearing comfortable clothing, adjusting room temperature, or adhering to repetitive study routines, unintentionally reveal ritualised behaviour. In folkloristics, such patterns may be regarded as "latent rituals": practices that, though not consciously imbued with belief, still carry symbolic function.

In conclusion, the lucky objects, clothing, and behaviour adopted by students prior to exams can be interpreted in folkloristic terms as modern talismans, personal totems, protective objects, and rites of passage. These practices, extending beyond individual psychology, represent strong evidence of the implicit relationship between modern academic life and folk culture. In this respect, the exam is not merely an assessment tool but a symbolic "liminal space" Turner (2018) in which cultural and psychological strategies are enacted and rendered visible.

Conclusion

This study clearly demonstrates that the pre-exam practices of students at Çanakkale Onsekiz Mart University represent modern ritual forms from a folkloristic perspective. The findings reveal that examinations function not only as measures of individual achievement but also as "rites of passage" sustained within social memory. Practices such as prayer, carrying amulets, using lucky objects, applying cologne, drinking coffee, or arranging specific study spaces emerge as contemporary reflections of folk beliefs and oral culture, transposed into the modern academic setting.

Behind these individual behavioural patterns lies the continuity of belief categories deeply rooted in folk culture, such as "luck," "talisman," "protection," and "purification." In this regard, exam rituals serve as cultural domains where traditional folk beliefs are reproduced, symbolically transformed, and endowed with new meanings within university life. Actions such as entering the exam hall with the right foot, attributing luck to a particular pen or piece of jewelry, or seeking strength from blessed food and drink illustrate the revival of transmitted folk beliefs within the modern academic context.

Moreover, collective practices such as group study sessions, joking, embracing silence, or sharing motivational content on social media represent contemporary forms of *imece* (communal cooperation), solidarity, and oral sharing traditions. In this way, individual rituals intertwine with community-based practices to create a modern folkloric universe within student culture.

In conclusion, this research positions pre-exam rituals as an important domain for folkloristic inquiry that makes visible both the continuity and transformation of folk culture in contemporary life. The pre-exam rituals of university students demonstrate how folkloric heritage is reshaped in modern contexts and position the examination as one of the most powerful rites of passage in contemporary society.

Ethics Approval

This study was approved by the Ethics Committee of Çanakkale Onsekiz Mart University, Social and Human Sciences Board, with the decision dated 18 April 2025 and numbered 71/143.

Oral Sources

P-1: Female, born 2003, undergraduate student (Medicine) Date of Interview: 27.04.2025
P-2: Female, born 2001, undergraduate student (Fine Arts) Date of Interview: 29.04.2025
P-3: Female, born 2002, undergraduate student (Medicine) Date of Interview: 28.04.2025
P-4: Female, born 2005, associate degree student (Child Development) Date of Interview: 30.04.2025
P-5: Male, born 2004, associate degree student (Mechanical) Date of Interview: 03.05.2025
P-6: Male, born 2006, associate degree student (Mechanical) Date of Interview: 01.05.2025
P-7: Female, born 2005, associate degree student (Child Development) Date of Interview: 02.05.2025
P-8: Female, born 2003, associate degree student (Child Development) Date of Interview: 29.04.2025
P-9: Female, born 2003, undergraduate student (Guidance and Psychological Counseling) Date of Interview: 30.04.2025
P-10: Male, born 2004, undergraduate student (Business Administration) Date of Interview: 27.04.2025
P-11: Female, born 2003, associate degree student (Gastronomy) Date of Interview: 07.05.2025
P-12: Female, born 2004, undergraduate student (Psychology) Date of Interview: 06.05.2025
P-13: Male, born 2005, associate degree student (Mechanical) Date of Interview: 11.05.2025
P-14: Female, born 2007, associate degree student (Child Development) Date of Interview: 10.05.2025
P-15: Female, born 2004, undergraduate student (Chemistry) Date of Interview: 29.04.2025
P-16: Female, born 2003, undergraduate student (Science Education) Date of Interview: 28.04.2025
P-17: Male, born 2004, undergraduate student (Midwifery) Date of Interview: 08.05.2025
P-18: Female, born 2002, undergraduate student (Science Education) Date of Interview: 09.05.2025
P-19: Female, born 2005, undergraduate student (Food Technology) Date of Interview: 09.05.2025
P-20: Female, born 2003, undergraduate student (Political Science and Public Administration) Date of Interview: 07.05.2025
P-21: Female, born 2003, undergraduate student (Medicine) Date of Interview: 07.05.2025
P-22: Female, born 2006, associate degree student (Office Management and Executive Assistance) Date of Interview: 08.05.2025
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