

Gender Difference in Test Anxiety among University Students in Jaffna, Srilanka

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Abstract: *Testing is an integral part of the learning process and must be properly devised to evaluate learning properly. While some anxiety is normal in a test situation and even helpful as it sharpens concentration and alertness, intense anxiety leads to poor performance affecting learning and grades so that becomes a problem. This problem could be differentially perceived by University male and female students. Hence the present study, The Suinn Test Anxiety behaviour scale (1971) was chosen for this research. It was individually administered to sixty Jaffna University Arts faculty students. The data was analyzed in terms of Mean, sd and t – ratio. Result indicates that there is a significant gender difference in test anxiety. It is concluded that female university students compared to their male counterparts have more test anxiety.*

Keywords: Anxiety, Students, Gender

1. Introduction

Test is necessary to measure a student's knowledge and skills. Most students experience uneasiness or tension before, and / or during a test, which is called "test anxiety". A small amount of tension or stress is expected; sometimes that nervousness works in favour by motivating them and sharpening their concentration and alertness. However, in large amounts, that tension can interfere or even impair their capacity to think, plan and perform tests. It will then lead to poor performance and begin to affect learning and grade, which becomes a problem.

Test anxiety is a result of a combination of psychological and physiological reactions that interfere with one's concentration while taking tests (Schaffer, 1996). Anxiety arises from the fact that tests expose the student's interiors and provide a form of accountability that most would escape (Thomas, 2002); in an academic setting, tests expose study habits, ability to remember certain facts, terms, formulas and concepts. Anxiety is thus created by expectations or thoughts about what is likely to happen. Despite adequate preparation, many students may not perform well on tests because of the fear of tests (Hurlock, 1978). Thus, test anxiety can hinder or even destroy a student's memory and attention in the short run. Psychological studies reveal that 'internals' are less test anxious than externals (Shelton & Malhinckrodt, 1991); highly test anxious students did more poorly on essay tests (Benjamin et al., 1981). Worry of suffering a reduction of the self image, particularly in the eyes of peers, leads to higher test anxiety levels (Freidman & Bendas – Jacob, 1997). Another factor that contributes to the development of test anxiety is self – awareness; it is defined as the feeling of being observed or evaluated by others. Other people's perception of the individual may have an impact on test anxiety (Levitt 1980). If Individual's experience associated with classroom is negative, and then test anxiety level will be higher (Spielberger & Sarason 1985). So far as it can be determined, it appears that no study has been done on test anxiety among male and female University students. Hence an attempt has been made to study the test anxiety of male and female University students by framing a null hypothesis that there will be no significant gender difference in test anxiety among University students.

2. Method

Sample

Two random samples of male and female University students from Jaffna University in Arts faculty were taken for the present study. They were 60 students; among them 30 were female students another 30 were male students from undergraduate departments of psychology and sociology.

Tool

It was proposed to administer a test anxiety behavior scale to the sample of students chosen for study. Among the many scales available, the Suinn Test Anxiety behavior scale (1971) was chosen for this research for it is reported to have adequate reliability and validity. The scale consisted of 20 statements; each had five alternative responses in terms of the anxiety level as follows – Not at all (1), A little (2), A fair amount (3), much (4), very much (5). The total score range is from 20 to 100. The higher score will be high in the test anxiety.

Procedure

The scale was group administered. Adequate time was given to the students for filling up of the scale. The investigators were present throughout the session to answer any further clarification.

Statistics

Various descriptive statistics were calculated and the differences between males and females University students in test anxiety were tested for statistical significance using the 't' – test.

3. Results and Discussion

A total of 60 male and female university students were studied in this research on test anxiety. Table - 1 given below shows the significance of difference in test anxiety among male and female University students.

Table 1: Shows the Mean, standard deviation and t-ratio on test anxiety among male and female University students

| Student sample | Mean | Mean Difference | S D | Standard Error | t - value | Level of significance |
|----------------|-------|-----------------|------|----------------|-----------|-----------------------|
| Male | 53.50 | 5.00 | 7.60 | 2.15 | 2.32 | <0.05 |
| Female | 58.50 | | 9.58 | | | |

As can be seen in table 1, the finding of the present study reveal significant gender differences in test anxiety refuting the null hypothesis advanced in the present study. Though the study revealed moderate test anxiety among both male and female University students yet it appears that female students have slightly higher anxiety levels compared to their male counterparts. The general reasons for this finding could be many. Lack of preparation is well known to cause test anxiety (Binkley et.al 2002) The other possible reasons are indulging in last minute cramming, poor time management and /or poor study habits (Jackson, 2000). Inadequate time to prepare, lack of advance notice, lack of clarity in the content of the examination and too much content could all contribute to test anxiety (Binkley et al., 2002). Perhaps these reasons are applicable more to female rather than male University students for the latter sex generally go by a 'don't care attitude' towards their subjects and exams at University level.

4. Conclusion

It is concluded from this study that female students have higher test anxiety level compared to their male counterparts. Further research is needed to measure test anxiety in a larger and more representative sample of University students. Also a method of test anxiety sensitization for male University students need to be found for management of test anxiety and improve academic success of University students.

References

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