



INVESTIGATING THE LEVEL OF TEST ANXIETY IN EFL STUDENTS' AT KANDAHAR UNIVERSITY, AFGHANISTAN

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Abstract:

The purpose of the current study was to investigate the level of test anxiety in EFL students' at Kandahar University. This was quantitative research approach in which survey questionnaire was developed to collect data from the students. One hundred and eighty students (freshmen, sophomore, junior and senior) were selected through the use of random sampling method which 159 were males and 21 were females. The data was analyzed by using IBM 24 version of SPSS and found out the frequency and percentage as well mean and standard deviation. The problem was that most of the students had test anxiety and failed in their final exam. The findings of this study revealed that students have high level of test anxiety before from the test because of not having time to study, not answering well to the questions and unseen questions in the test. As well as, students have high level anxiety during the test; they could not remember the answers in the test area, limitation of the time and the use of hard words in the questions. Moreover, lack of self-confidence about given answers to the questions and giving wrong answers to the questions made the students to have high level of test anxiety after the test.

Keywords: test, test anxiety, EFL Students

1. Introduction

Examination is a process of analysis, identification, and evaluation, interpretation in any type of academic evaluation conducted to measure and assess the students' academic performance. Test is a set of questions, problems or exercises to which the students are asked to response to obtain an appraisal of designated characteristics of the students such as specific kind of knowledge, aptitude, abilities and skills. Examination plays vital role in order to assess the abilities of the students. Through examination,

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teachers can analyze strengths and weaknesses of the students. It is the only tool for the evaluation of different aspects relating to teaching learning process. It is a source of inspiration for students to do well in examination and get praise from teachers and parents. Through examinations, the effectiveness of curriculum and performance of teacher can be judged (Khatoon & Parveen, 2009).

According to Bouras & Holt (2007) the word anxiety means to annoy or problem, it doesn't matter that any psychological trouble is present or not, anxiety makes one to feel worry, bothered and stress. Every human being encounter with anxiety but it has different aspects. Anxiety is one of the most common psychological disorders in educational settings worldwide (Sibnath, Pooja & Kerryann, 2010). Test anxiety is defined by scholars differently. Test anxiety is the worry, uneasiness, or fear experienced before, during or after a test. Any tension, fear, or feeling of worry is known to be test anxiety. Test anxiety is not just before a test as most of us think. It is very common to experience similar anxiety during and for hours and even days after a test. Every student who takes a test experiences some form of test anxiety. This is a normal reaction of students for test. Test anxiety is a psychological condition in which people experience stress, anxiety, uneasiness and irrational fear during or before exam (Sindhu, 2015).

Similarly, test anxiety is the psychological condition of brain of contestant as articulated by the degree of concern, dread, ambiguity, fear and weakness shown before taking an exam, during, or even after an exam (Olatoye & Afuwape, 2003). The problem that was noted for this study was that most of the students had test anxiety and failed in their final exam. As concerned Avinor (2008), between 15% and 35% of students are adversely affected by high test anxiety. According to Butt & Akram, (2013) test anxiety is one of the major problems among students and it is also thought to be one of the biggest barriers in achieving good grades. This study wants to fill this gap through conducting a study in this context because there are few studies carried out regarding to test anxiety. This research would help with teachers and students of Universities and schools. Instructors will understand from the students who have anxiety from the test in various stages, before the test, during, and after the test. Students' will get information about test anxiety. Through this study, students of universities and schools will encourage to learn several ways that could help them to perform well in the test and have high marks in the exam. In addition, students' will be motivated to have test without anxiety as before the students had; if this anxiety is before the test, during or after the test.

1.2 The Purpose Statement

The purpose of this study is to investigate the levels of test anxiety in EFL students' at Kandahar University.

1.3 Objective of the Research

- To investigate test anxiety levels in EFL students, before the test, during, and after the test at Kandahar University.

1.4 Research Question

- What are the levels of test anxiety, before the test, during, and after the test in EFL students' at Kandahar University?

2. Literature Review

Examinations at all periods of education, especially at higher education level have been considered an essential and powerful instrument for decision making in our competitive society, with people of all ages being evaluated with respect to their accomplishment, skills and capabilities (Rana & Mahmood, 2010). Test anxiety is a subjective emotional state, experienced before, during or after a specific assessment, that relates to the act of completing the evaluation itself, the threat of failing, and any associated negative consequences (Bonnaccio & Reeve, 2010, Zeidner, & Schleyer, 1999; Pekrun, Goetz, Perry, Kramer, Hochstadt & Molfenter, 2004; Ahmad & Halawachy, 2013). An acceptable level of test anxiety encourages learners to work hard and provides them with its positive consequences. Nowadays, test anxiety is more observed between students, and it might be due to more prominent role of tests in educational system than some decades ago (Chapell, Blanding, Takahashi, Silverstein, Newman & McCann, 2005). The concept of anxiety plays a major role in one's life. One of these anxieties is test anxiety or distress over academic evaluation (Rezazadeh & Tavakoli, 2009).

Research conducted by Sibnath, Pooja & Keryann, (2010) in India, to find out anxiety among adolescents. The findings of this study revealed that anxiety was widespread in the sample with 20.1% of boys and 17.9% of girls found to be suffering from high anxiety. More boys were anxious than girls and adolescents from Bengali medium schools were more anxious than those who were from English medium schools. In addition, adolescents belonging to the middle class suffered more anxiety compare to those who were from both high and low socio-economic groups. This study further discovered that youths who were working with their mothers were anxious and anxiety was widespread in the sample with one-fifth of the boys and less than one-fifth of the girls registered high anxiety. In addition, in University of Isfahan, Iran, study carried out to investigate test anxiety level of EFL students. The findings of this study asserted that in general male and female students' had similar levels of test anxiety. This study further showed that female students were more worried in these two stages, namely before and during the test however they were prepared well than male students. In the third stage, namely after the test male and female students had no fear at all from the test (Rezazadeh & Tavakoli, 2009).

Similarly, Rana & Mahmood (2010) to explore the relationship between test anxiety and academic achievement of the students at the post graduate level in Lahore, Pakistan. The finding of this study revealed that there is a significant negative relationship exists among test anxiety scores and students' achievement scores. Khalid & Hasan (2009) conducted a study on undergraduate students to explore the relationship between test anxiety and academic achievement. The study found that students with academic accomplishment have low test anxiety scores and vice versa. A study conducted by Nicholson (2009) to explore the effects of test anxiety on the achievement of students. The finding revealed that anxiety and attainment are related to each other. Moreover, a number of studies carried out to investigate the level of test anxiety in students. The finding of these studies disclosed that female students had higher level of test anxiety compare to male students from the test (Butt & Akram 2013; Farooqi, Ghani & Spielberger, 2012; Chapell et al., 2005; Cassady & Johnson, 2002; Bandalos, Yates & Thorndike-Christ, 1995; Mwamwenda, 1994). In addition, the study of Butt & Akram (2013) revealed more that students of pure science encountered significantly higher level of test anxiety than students of social science.

Ahmed & Halawachy (2013) conducted a research to investigate test anxiety of EFL students' in University of Mosul. The finding of this study asserted that both males and females suffer from similar levels of test anxiety. This study further indicated that females have higher levels of test anxiety than males before and during the test. Moreover, the findings asserted that the academic and personal factors of test anxiety have affected female students but not males, while the social factors have influenced both of them by similar levels of test anxiety. As well as, similar finding reported that males and females students have similar levels of test anxiety (Javed & Khan, 2011). Similarly, study by Sindhu (2015), to find out the effective factors of test anxiety in India. The effective factors of test anxiety were socially and leads to social withdrawal, avoidance of friends and family, self-defeating thought, suicidal thoughts, and so on. This study further demonstrated that a small number of depressive signs increase the hazard for academic performance. The study suggested for colleges and universities students that they must fully understand the reason of test anxiety.

According to the study of Ndirangu, Muola, Kithuka & Nassiuma, (2009) in Nyeri district, Kenya, to determine the relationship between test anxiety and academic performance among students. This study displayed that there was a statistically significant difference between test anxiety levels before and after examination. Furthermore, the findings also disclosed that high anxiety was experienced before the examination in all subjects. The study further declared that teachers do not adequately help students cope with test anxiety. There was no significant connection between test anxiety and academic performance. As well as, study to find out test anxiety and academic performance in undergraduate and graduate students. The finding of this study suggested that test anxiety is one of those factors influence undergraduate and graduate students' academic performance and supported that there was a significant but small universe relationship between test anxiety and grade point average (GPA) in

both undergraduate and graduate students (Chapell, et al., 2005). Study in Bostan, Iran by Young (1999) carried out a research to find test anxiety of students. The findings of this study asserted that unfamiliar types of questions make students feel anxious especially after spending hours anxious when they prepare themselves before the tests. Similarly, Ohata (2005) carried out a research to explore the nature of language anxiety from the perspective of five students in Japan. The findings unfolded that most of the students had anxiety before and during the test. The study further indicated that this situation made them fear and these negative consequences made them to get low marks in the test.

3. Material and Method

3.1 Research Design

As the current study tries to investigate the level of test anxiety in EFL students' at Kandahar University, a descriptive quantitative research method is considered to be suitable for this study. According to Aliaga & Gunderson, (2002) quantitative research method is the explaining of a topic or phenomenon through gathering data in numerical form and analyzing with the assist of mathematical approach; in particular statistics.

3.2 Population & Sampling

In this study, the participants are EFL students from Kandahar University. The participants were from Education Faculty and Faculty of Languages and Literature, English departments. The sample size was (180) students' (freshmen, sophomore, junior, and senior). The participants are selected through random sampling method. According to Wilkinson (1999), a sample of people that is representative of a larger group of population.

3.3 Research Instrument

The present study is descriptive in nature in which quantitative survey questionnaire is used for collecting data instrument consisting from four parts demographic data, test anxiety before test, during, and after test. Part B, C, & D are an adoption of Ahmed's & Halawachy (2013) study. The items of questionnaire were twenty simple statements classified according to timing, which includes three stages, namely before the test (7 items), during the test (6 items) and after the test (7 items). Subjects are asked to respond on five point Likert rating scale ranging from "Strongly Agree" to "Strongly Disagree".

3.4 Validity of the Questionnaire

The questionnaire was presented to the supervisor teacher; some of the items were changed partially and then revised from the researcher side. When the questionnaire

was revised, then supervisor teacher checked it for the next time. After checking the questionnaire again some changes were made and then finalized.

3.5 Reliability of the Questionnaire

Reliability generally refers to the extent to which a variable or set of variable is consistent in what is intended to measure (Hair, Black, Babin, Anderson & Tatham, 2006). The reliability of the instrument is 0.8 Crohnbach's Alpha which is considered good. The general reliability values between .75 and 1.00 are considered excellent, .60-.74 is good, .40-.59 is fair and below .40 is poor (Madan & Kensinger, 2017).

3.6 Data Analysis Procedures

The data was analyzed by using IBM 24 version of SPSS and found out the frequency, percentage, mean and standard deviation of the participants.

4. Findings

4.1 Characteristics of the Respondents

Table 1.1 shows the demographic information of the respondents in categories of gender, level of education, age, and faculty.

Table 1.1: Demographic data

Distribution of respondents by demographic information			
Characteristics		Frequency	Percentage
Gender:	Male	159	88.3
	Female	21	11.7
Level of Education:	Freshmen	48	26.7
	Sophomore	32	17.8
	Junior	42	23.3
	Senior	58	32.2
Age:	Under 20	54	30
	Between 20 & 25	111	61.7
	Upper 25	8	4.4
	Upper 28	7	3.9
Faculty:	Education Faculty	80	44.4
	Languages and Literature Faculty	100	55.6

Table 1.1 shows the demographic data of the participants. Out of one hundred eighty (88.3%) are male and (11.7%) are female students. Depending to their level of education, freshmen are (26.7%), sophomore (17.8%), junior (23.3%) and senior (32.2%). With regard to age under 20 years old are (30%), between 20 and 25 are (61.7%), upper 25 are (4.4%) and upper 28 were (3.9%) students. Regarding to faculty division (44.4%) are students from education faculty, English Department and (55.6%) are from languages and literature faculty, English Department.

Research Question 1: What are the levels of test anxiety in EFL students' at Kandahar University?

Table 1.2: Anxiety before the test

No	Items	Mean	Std. Deviation
6	I might not have enough time to study.	2.81	1.19
4	I might not answer well; as a result, I will not get a good mark.	2.76	1.24
2	There might be unseen questions.	2.62	1.10
3	The questions might be in a form I am not familiar with and hence I will not know how to answer.	2.54	1.07
7	The material to be cover for the exam is too long.	2.48	1.30
5	The questions will require long answers and I will not have enough time.	2.29	1.17
1	The questions might be very difficult	2.02	.99

Likert Scale: 1. Strongly Agree 2. Agree 3. Undecided 4. Disagree 5. Strongly Disagree

Table 1.2 indicates anxiety before the test. All items got the high mean scores. Item number 6 shows that students do not have sufficient time to study for the test ($M=2.81$, $SD=1.19$). The next item 4 reveals that students do not give answers to the questions as a consequence it effects on their marks. ($M=2.76$, $SD=1.24$). As well as, the item number 2 asserts that students may encounter with such kind of questions in the test paper that they didn't get familiarize with them before in the test ($M=2.62$, $SD=1.10$). This item followed by the item number 3 which reveals that teacher might bring students questions that they are not familiarized with them as a result they will not answers to the questions ($M=2.5$, $SD=1.07$). In addition, the following items got the low mean score compare to the above items. Item number 7 demonstrates that students have anxiety because they cannot cover all the material that they covered during the semester ($M=2.48$, $SD=1.30$). The next item number 5 reveals that students have apprehension because they will face with the lack of time and they will not able to give the required long answers in the test ($M=2.29$, $SD=1.17$). Finally, the result of the last item specifies that students have anxiety because they think that the questions may be hard to give answer ($M=2.02$, $SD=.99$).

Table 1.3: Anxiety during the test

No	Items	Mean	Std. Deviation
13	I think I will definitely fail.	3.46	1.27
11	I feel totally lost.	3.17	1.26
9	I cannot remember the answers.	2.69	1.20
12	I might not have enough time to answer.	2.57	1.19
10	The wording of the question might make me not understand some vocabulary items.	2.39	1.02
8	I feel unstable and review my answers too many times.	2.26	.94

Likert Scale: 1. Strongly Agree 2. Agree 3. Undecided 4. Disagree 5. Strongly Disagree

Table 1.3 illustrates anxiety during the test. The entire items had the mean scores between the ranges of two to three. Items number 13 ($M=3.46$, $SD=1.27$) and 11 ($M=3.17$,

SD=1.26) got the highest rating in these items. These two items show that students don't have any decision regarding to these statements and this is inferred that they do not feel anxious to be fail in the exam; as well they stated that we do not feel completely lost during the test. Similarly, the next item number 9 shows that students cannot remember the answers for the questions when they are in the test area (M=2.69, SD=1.20). This item is followed by the item 9 that students may not have enough time to solve the questions because they feel anxious (M=2.69, SD=1.20). Moreover, the item 10 shows that students have anxiety because they may not understand the words in questions that teacher have used in the test paper (M=2.39, SD=1.02). The final item number 8 shows the lowest mean score that students are not sure about the given answers and they review answers for several times during the test(M=2.26, D=.94).

Table 1.4: Anxiety after the test

No	Items	Mean	Std. Deviation
15	I might have forgotten to put down my name on the test paper.	3.23	1.31
17	I do not know if I have given the required answers.	2.72	1.16
19	There was a question to be left out and I am not sure if I have done that.	2.70	1.07
20	I discovered that what I expected to be right answers turned to be wrong.	2.65	1.28
16	I might get unexpected mark.	2.53	1.06
18	My mark will be lower than those of my close friends.	2.53	1.16
14	There might be a mistake in scoring my paper.	2.10	.98

Likert Scale: 1. Strongly Agree 2. Agree 3. Undecided 4. Disagree 5. Strongly Disagree

Table 1.4 shows anxiety after the test. All items got the mean scores in the ranges of two to three. The item number 15 indicates that students don't have any decision regarding to this statement because they were undecided (M=3.23, SD=1.31). The item number 17 shows that students have anxiety because they are not sure of the given answers to the questions (M=2.72, SD= 1.16). The next item is followed by 19 which show that students are anxious that they leave the question what the teachers were required from them. Similarly, item number 20 shows that what the students wished that the given answers to the questions are correct but in fact they were wrong (M=2.62, SD=1.28). Furthermore, the following items got the low mean scores compare to the above ones. Item 16 reveals that students may get unexpected result in the test. The next item 18 shows students fear because their classmates will get high marks than them in the test (M=2.53, 1.16). Finally, the item 14 reveals that students have anxiety because teacher/s might make mistake when they give mark to the test paper especially when they fill the result sheet for announcing (M=2.10, SD=.98).

5. Discussion

The findings of this study show that students have high level of test anxiety before from the test. Many students had anxiety before from the test because they did not have enough time to study for the test (M=2.81, SD=1.19). Moreover, learners' were anxious from the questions of test paper and they did not able to answer well in order to receive

good marks from the teachers ($M=2.76$, $SD=1.24$). As well as, students' were anxious from unseen questions in the test paper ($M=2.62$, $SD=1.10$). This findings is supported by the study of Ndirangu, et al., (2009) that high anxiety were experienced from the side of students' before the examination in all subjects. In addition, this finding also described by Ohata (2005) that students' had apprehension before the test. Similarly, this study also found that students' had anxiety during the test. Students were anxious because students could not remember the answer when they were in test. Moreover, learners had anxiety because students did not have enough time during the test. It means they encountered with the lack of time. The use of sophisticated words in the questions made the students anxious. This finding is in agreement with Ohata's (2005) that most of the students' had anxiety before and during the test. These situations made the students anxious and affected them to get low marks in their tests.

In addition, this current study further found that students' had high level of test anxiety after the test. Students did not have self-confidence on their selves because when the students gave answers to the questions they were repeating their given answers for several times ($M=2.72$, $SD=1.16$). Students stated that there was a question to be left out, they were not sure that they left out or not ($M=2.70$, $SD= 1.07$). As well as, learners thought that the given answers to the questions are correct but in fact those were wrong ($M=2.65$, $SD= 1.28$). This finding is against by Rezazadeh & Tavakoli (2009) which demonstrated that in the third stage, namely (after the test) male and female students' had no fear at all from the test. Moreover, the findings of the study is more supported by the studies that female students have higher level of test anxiety compare to male students (Butt & Akram 2013; Farooqi, Ghani & Spielberger, 2012; Chapell et al., 2005; Cassady & Johnson, 2002; Bandalos, Yates & Thorndike-Christ, 1995; Mwamwenda, 1994). As well as, test anxiety is reported that it is a subjective emotional state experienced before, during and after a specific assessment (Bonnaccio & Reeve, 2010, Zeidner, & Schleyer, 1999; Pekrun, Goetz, Perry, Kramer, Hochstadt & Molfenter, 2004; Ahmad & Halawachy, 2013).

6. Conclusion and Recommendations

The study examined the level of test anxiety in EFL students' at Kandahar University. The finding of this study disclosed that there is an existence of high level of test anxiety in EFL students' before from the test because of not having time for the study, not answering well to the questions and unseen questions in the test paper. As well as, students have anxiety during the test, they could not remember the answers in the test area, limitation of the time and the used of sophisticated words in the questions. In addition, learners have high anxiety after the test, lack of self-confidence about given answers to the questions and giving wrong responses to the questions. This study recommends to the students to understand the way of teachers how they bring the questions in the test paper as well specify time for regular study, finally keep in mind the time when they are in the test area.

6.1 Suggestions for Further Study

This study investigated the level of test anxiety in EFL students' at Kandahar University. Therefore, the following suggestions are given for further study: to investigate the components of test anxiety that affect the academic achievement and performance of the students, causes and challenges of test anxiety, types of test anxiety, the attitudes of learners' toward test anxiety and also to investigate the solutions for the test anxiety of students.

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