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Test Anxiety Among Students of Upper Primary Level

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Abstract

Test anxiety refers to a symptom or group of symptoms that can induce 'worries' and tension, and sometimes physiological symptoms like blood pressure increase or in some cases decrease (Kazdin, 2000). The main objective of this paper is to find out the test anxiety among students of upper primary level. To achieve this objective, the researcher used a tool named 'test anxiety scale'. The tool consists of 55 items. The reliability of the test was found to be 0.81 by the split-half method, and the content and face validity of the test were also established. A purposive sampling technique was used to select a total of 100 students. It was found that half of the samples have an average level of test anxiety. These results reveal that nearly half the sample of students in the present study experienced Average Test Anxiety. This indicates that the other half were not unduly stressed or anxious about their examination or test. The remaining half of the sample of students was distributed nearly equally into the other two categories, i.e., Lower Test Anxiety and Higher Test Anxiety.

The paper concludes by stating that anxiety does not suddenly manifest itself at the upper primary stage; it quite certainly originates at the primary stage. Parents, teachers and all stakeholders need to ensure that assessment should not lead to an undue increase in stress levels at the primary stage, for this would have repercussions in later academic life.

INTRODUCTION

Anxiety is a normal reaction of apprehension, tension, or uneasiness to any perceived threat or anticipation of danger (Chauhan, S.S, 2000). It is

considered a problem when symptoms interfere with a person's ability to sleep or otherwise function. Studies showed that different types of disorders caused by anxiety have a high frequency all

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over the world, and test anxiety is one of the most common disorders among them (Cheraghian et al., 2008). A low level of stress is necessary, but it is sometimes so complicated that it limits individual performance in tests and leads to a behavioural disorder or low confidence, or poor academic performance. Due to cutthroat competition in school education, test anxiety is prevalent among students than a few years ago. Students of all academic achievement levels suffer from academic anxiety. Even students who do well on classwork and homework can suffer from test anxiety and do poorly on tests (Bensoussan, 2012). Frequent poor academic performance can increase anxiety levels.

Test anxiety refers to the appraisal of a test or other evaluative situation as threatening and consists of distinct cognitive, affective physiological and behavioural components (Zeidner & Mathews, 2005). Spielberg and Sarason define test anxiety as a situation-specific trait that refers to anxiety states experienced during examinations. This is a complex and multidimensional construct, embodying distinct individual perceptions, and physiological and behavioural responses (Cited by Zhang and Henderson, 2014). Test anxious pupils have difficulty concentrating on tests, and in reading and understanding test instructions and questions; they become easily distracted, and experience problems in recalling learnt material (King, Ollendick & Gullone, 1998 cited

by Dutta and Dasgupta, 2013). Thergaonka N.R. (2007) reported that in a competitive educational system, parents compel their children to get a higher score than others, they always force children to study most of the time and prior to the examination, and children are not allowed to play, watch TV, or spend time with family members. High expectations of parents and pressure to secure a position on the merit list may cause test anxiety among students. Anxiety among students and their parents has been reported to be on the rise in India, especially among those facing board certification examinations. Curse, A. et al., (2010) found girls had higher test anxiety levels than boys. In this study, students reported that tests affect their performance negatively and cause them to forget what they know. Students studying with lower degrees are more anxious than those who are more familiar with the test taking process in the academic environment (Nejad, et al., 2011). It was also reported that there is more impact of anxiety on female students as compared to male students.

Based on a review of the above literatures and from personal experience, the investigator came to know that most of the students experienced anxiety before and during the examination. Such situations raise the question in the researcher's mind—is there any difference in test anxiety among upper primary students? Hence, the present study

has been done by the investigator to seek the answer to the above question.

RESEARCH PROBLEM

Test Anxiety among students of upper primary level.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

- To assess the test anxiety among students of upper primary level.
- To compare the test anxiety among students of upper primary level concerning their gender.

HYPOTHESES OF THE STUDY

The following null hypotheses are framed and the level of significance is taken as 0.05.

H01: There is no significant difference in the test anxiety of boys and girls of upper primary level.

METHODOLOGY

Keeping in mind the nature of the present research problem, descriptive survey method was found to be the most suitable for this study. All the upper primary students enrolled in CBSE affiliated schools of Varanasi city were taken as the population of the study. A total of 100 students, 50 boys and 50 girls of upper primary level (classes VI-VIII) were withdrawn from the population. A purposive sampling technique was adopted for the selection of first schools and the students studying in them.

To achieve the objectives of the present study a tool known as the

“Test Anxiety Scale” which has been developed and standardised by researchers was used to know the test anxiety level among students. This tool consisted of 55 items, which cover different dimensions of test anxiety— like physiological (11 items) emotional (11 items), behavioural (13 items) and cognitive (14 items). The physiological dimension refers to physical signs like perspiration, sweaty palms, feeling too hot or too cold, headaches, upset stomach, nausea, rapid heartbeat shallow/irregular breathing, dizziness muscle tightness. The emotional dimension denotes the indicators such as feeling fearful, guilty, angry, depressed or uncertain. Procrastination and avoidance, excessive study, over/under eating; poor nutrition, sleeping too much or too little, fatigue or inability to relax are the symptoms of behavioural dimension. In the cognitive dimension, individuals have characteristics like negative or self-defeating talk, excessive worry, difficulty in concentration, difficulty in identifying key ideas, difficulty in organising and expressing thoughts, and going blank on exam questions

There are six filler items whose marks were not added to the final score. Items were close-ended. Each item has two response categories, viz., “Yes” and “No”. The reliability of the test was found to be 0.81 by the split-half method. The content and face validity of the test were also established. Students were categorised into three categories

based on the score obtained on the Test Anxiety Scale, i.e., low test anxiety (Score 0–12), average test anxiety (score 12–24) and higher test anxiety (score above 24).

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

In order to verify the stated hypotheses, data were analysed with the help of the SPSS package. The level of confidence was fixed at 0.05 for testing the hypothesis. The results have been reported, interpreted and discussed objective-wise.

- To assess the level of test anxiety among students of upper primary level.

The first objective of the present study is to assess test anxiety among the students of upper primary levels. A close-ended test anxiety scale was administered to determine the pattern of distribution of students into different levels of test anxiety. The scores obtained from upper primary students are matched with the established Test Anxiety Scale (TAS) norms for different levels of anxiety.

Upper primary students' whose scores are less than 12 are categorised as having lower test anxiety. Whereas, students' who scores above 24 fall in the higher anxiety category, and those students whose test anxiety score is between 12–24 are declared as having average test anxiety. The following table summarises the number and percentage of upper primary students falling into the different categories of test anxiety levels:

The result reveals that nearly half the sample of students in the present study experienced average test anxiety. It indicates that the majority of the students were not unduly stressed or anxious about their examinations or test. They may worry slightly and may experience some form of behavioural or emotional problems, but they can easily handle and manage them. This level of anxiety is considered not to be very harmful and may sometimes prove to be good for students to encourage them to perform better in their tests.

Table 1: Test anxiety level among students of upper primary level

Level of Education	Students are categorised under respective test anxiety levels.						N (total no. of students)
	Lower test anxiety		Average test anxiety		Higher test anxiety		
Upper primary	No of Students	%	No of Students	%	No of Students	%	
	24	24	48	48	28	28	100

The remaining half of the sample of students is distributed nearly equally into the other two categories, i.e., lower test anxiety and higher test anxiety. 28 per cent of the sample of students at upper levels experienced higher test anxiety. Before the examination, they experienced rising anxiety while during the examination they felt either too hot or too cold. They also had headaches, stomach upsets, or nausea during or a few days before the examination or test. They also suffered behavioural irregularities like restlessness, dizziness, recurrent urination, and frequent thirst, besides excessive or very less sleep and hunger.

From the above table, it is clear that approximately 1/4th of students have lower-level test anxiety. It was conveyed that these students remained relaxed and carefree during and before their examinations or tests. They experienced very little behavioural and emotional trauma.

significant relationship between test anxiety, age, and the level of education. Nejad, et al., (2011) and Prabhudeva (2007), of whom, suggested that students studying with lower degrees are more anxious than those who are more familiar with the test-taking process in the academic environment.

Gender-wise comparison of the test anxiety among students of upper primary level to examine objective-2, which aims to compare the test anxiety among boys and girls of upper levels in relation to their respective gender, the t-test has been calculated as shown in the following tables:

It has been revealed in the above table that the calculated value of t for $df = 98$ is $t_{0.05} = 3.320$, and the p-value is $.001 < 0.05$. This shows that the p-computed value is at 0.05 levels of significance for the degree of freedom 98. Hence, the null hypothesis, that “there is no significant difference in the test anxiety in male and female students of upper primary

Table 2:

T-test analysis for test anxiety between Female and Male upper primary students

Level of education	Gender	N	Mean	Std. deviation	Std. error mean	T	Df	p-value sig. (2-tailed)	Inference
Upper primary level	Male	50	15.88	8.115	1.147	3.320	98	.001	Significant
	Female	50	21.10	7.597	1.074				

In fact, they enjoyed their daily routine or sometimes had fun during examinations days.

The finding of the present study is supported by the study of Cheraghian, et al., (2008). They reported no

level” was not accepted. The higher mean score of females in comparison to males reveals that girl students in upper primary classrooms are experiencing more test anxiety than their counterparts.

These may be due to factors related to the gender bias of school, society and parents. In the upper primary stage, girls are maturing towards puberty. Many stereotypes in our society, associated with girls and their education have an adverse effect on their personalities. Girls are psychologically struggling for their acceptance at home, society and school which harms their self-esteem; hence, this may be a possible reason for the higher test anxiety experienced by these students.

This finding is supported by the findings of Gurse, et. al, (2010), Mohammad et al., (2012) and Annayat and Tina (2014). They also reported that the impact of anxiety is more on female students as compared to male students. However, Deb and Walsh (2010) found that boys were more anxious than girls.

RESULTS OF THE STUDY

- In a nutshell, it emerges from this study that students of upper primary level showed a normal distribution pattern of test anxiety. It had also been concluded that approximately half of the sample of students, had higher (28%) and low levels (24%) of test anxiety, which may adversely affect their cognitive functions and hinder healthy mental development.
- The study reported that approximately (25%) of students fall under the category of high level

of test anxiety, which needs more concern and attention. Severe anxiety disorders lead to cognitive distortions, dysfunctional schema, psychosomatic complaints, headaches, stomach aches, fainting, etc. Educational psychology literature reports that consequences of severe anxiety include cautious or rigid thinking, limited responsiveness, interference with cognitive processes, diminution of complex intellectual processing and problem-solving, heightened susceptibility to persuasion, higher likelihood of imitating models and increased attention to oneself rather than to the environment. Dobson, (2012) suggested that problem-based learning, discussing test procedures with students and teaching study, and test-taking skills are methods to help students feel more in control of the outcome of academic tasks.

CONCLUSION

Teachers and parents can teach students the skills that they need to be in control of learning, which would help in controlling anxiety. It is further suggested that an average level of anxiety is useful in keeping pupils motivated in learning (Alam, 2017). Moderately anxious students did better as compared to the high and low-anxious students in academic achievement.

Test Anxiety mostly works as a hindrance to students' academic performance. Many non-clinical and clinical preventive measures are available to handle the problem of severe test anxiety prevalent among students, but the need of the hour is to create awareness among students and teachers about them.

In an informal talk with the teachers, parents and students it was observed by the researcher that teachers, as well as parents, created fear in the students regarding examinations or tests hence, there is a need to think about this because it brings some trouble. Presently students come with experience of tests or examinations from a very early stage, i.e., from the primary level. So there is a need to ensure that students enjoy this assessment process, and do not develop any type of fear about the exam. One of the objectives of a continuous and comprehensive evaluation is for examination to become part of teaching-learning, so that it minimises the effect of examination or test phobia among the students. Hence, teachers as well as parents,

must think about achieving this objective. Such type of psychological pressure, directly and indirectly, affects the all-around development of a child.

Anxiety does not suddenly manifest itself at the upper primary stage; it quite certainly originates at the primary stage. A positive or negative attitude towards tests and assessments is developed over time, created by teachers as they introduce or inform about the concept of tests or examinations. Hence, the role of primary teachers becomes very important in developing a healthy and conducive environment during teaching as well as examinations or tests. If students have test anxiety at the primary level, it will impact subsequent stages and their future academic life as well.

There is a need to organise various types of assessment activities to minimise the negative impact of examination stress. In addition, the focus on achievement and overall development of an individual, contributing to local and global society should always be kept in mind.

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