



The Relationship between Test Anxiety and Learners' Overall Achievement in the English Course

Nafiseh Amin Nia

Islamic Azad University of Science & Research Branch, Damavand, Iran.

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ABSTRACT

Among all researches in the field of learners' overall achievement, the effect of test anxiety of test takers' has rarely been explored. And also, this present study is an effort to examine the anxiety of pupils in relation with overall achievement in the English course and the effect of their behavior on their performance on overall achievement test in the English course at the end of term. Data was collected by using the anxiety questionnaire developed by Richard Driscoll. A total of 200 participants were selected for this study. Accordingly, a standardized anxiety questionnaire was administered to 100 female and 100 male pupils in order to discover whether there is a relationship between test anxiety and learners' overall achievement in the English course in the middle school in different genders. The findings have implications for testing, teaching, and syllabus design.

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Introduction

Foreign Language Anxiety

According to Schleyer and Zeidner (1999, p.260), "Given that anxiety is based on an individual's perception of lack of success or fear of failure, rather than just his or her innate abilities, intellectually gifted students also are vulnerable to test anxiety". MacIntyre & Gardner (1989; 1991a; 1991b) also, Foreign language anxiety has been identified as different from other types of anxiety and is specific to the foreign language-learning situation. According to Spielberger (1972, p.176), "It is common to divide anxiety into two domains: trait anxiety and state anxiety". On the other hand, Sarason (1990, p.2) also, Test anxiety is composed of three major components: cognitive, affective, and behavioral.

Test Anxiety

Aida (1994) said that "test anxiety may be caused by students' shortcomings in their learning or study skills. Because some students do not know how to process or organize the course material and information, they feel anxious during a test situation". Horwitz. Et al. (1986) also, maintain that test anxious students often put unrealistic demands on themselves and feel that anything less than a perfect test performance is a failure.

Learner's achievement

The classical achievement theory (Atkinson, 1964; Atkinson and Feather, 1966) posits that all individuals have a basic motive or tendency to seek and approach success, one that instigates and maintains actions directed at achieving success. At the same time, people have an antagonistic motive to avoid failure, which seeks to direct behavior away from the achievement task. Fear of failure involves the disposition to be anxious about failure and the consequent desire to avoid fraught situations with possible failure (Atkinson, 1964). Thus, academic achievement is important to these students because self-esteem is often contingent on academic success.

Anxiety and Second Language Learning

According to Leary, (1990), "the relations among anxiety, cognition, second language learning and behavior are best seen as recursive or cyclical, where each influences the other. Cognitive performance is diminished because of the divided

attention and therefore performance suffers, leading to negative self-evaluations and more self-rebuking cognition which further impairs performance, and So on. The majority of language anxiety scales, like Horwitz et al.'s (1986) Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (FLACS) are trait based scales.

Method

Participants

Two schools were selected from the middle schools of Tehran with different genders (males and females). The sample comprised 200 students (Male = 100, Female = 100). The participants' age ranged from 12 to 13 years old. They took the Persian version of Test Anxiety Scale (TAS) piloted by Richard Driscoll, Bruce Holt, and Lori Hunter in the American School Counselor Association (Orlando, Florida, June 27, 2005) and the American Psychological Association (Washington, DC, August 20, 2005). The Persian version of Test Anxiety Scale (TAS) was piloted in two groups (50 females and 50 males) of middle school.

Instrumentation

First, the Westside test anxiety scales by Richard Driscoll 2004, and, second, the Persian version of the same Test Anxiety Scale were used in this study. Another instrument used in this study was the achievement test that teachers administered at the end of the term. This test included reading, dictation, vocabulary, and grammar. The questions included a variety of item types like; multiple choice items, short-answer questions, and completion items.

Procedure

All participants were introduced to the purpose and procedures of the study before administering the instruments. The achievement test and the test anxiety scale were administered to 200 students in the middle school in different genders. Following this step, the participants took the achievement test examining the material taught in the class. The participants were asked to fill out the questionnaire carefully with enough time of 45 minutes. After that, the researcher interviewed each of the students individually to make sure they understood the anxiety scale which was designed by Richard

Driscoll (2004). Then, the administration of TAS took approximately 10 minutes.

Results

For purposes of data analysis, first of all the achievement test was unscrambled and sorted so that all the questions related to any variable could be seen and scored together. Then every Likert scale item was given a mathematical value and the items related to English anxiety and fear of assimilation were scored reversely because the more fear of assimilation and anxiety about L2 learning language learners have, the less L2 anxiety they have. The first paired samples t test was conducted to compare the score of anxiety between genders. There was a statistically significant difference between the scores for anxiety score ($M= 1.08$, $SD= 0.36812$), with $t= 2.934$, $p=0.027$). The second paired samples t test was conducted to compare the overall achievement test score and two genders at the end of the study. The results showed that there was not a statistically significant difference between the scores for two genders ($M=-0.79650$, $SD=0.44578$, with $t=-1.787$, $p=0.000$). There was no statistically significant difference between the scores on the test by gender at the end of the study. There was a statistically significant difference between the anxiety score and the performance of the two genders ($M=1.080$, $SD=0.36812$, with $t=2.934$, $p=0.027$). Concerning variable specific kinds of L2 anxiety, there was a statistically significant difference between the anxiety score and two genders at the end of study. The results of the first independent samples t test showed that the anxiety score and genders were not homogeneous in relation to their L2 anxiety. The second independent samples t test was conducted to compare the results of the overall achievement test and genders at the end of study. There was not a statistically significant difference between achievement test and gender ($M=-0.79650$, $SD=0.44578$, with $t=-1.787$, $p=0.000$) at the end of the study. Concerning variable specific kinds of anxiety, the results indicated that there was not a statistically significant difference between the achievement test and genders at the end of study.

Discussion

Concerning the first finding of the study, that anxiety has a significant negative effect on the improvement of Iranian EFL learners' achievement test. The results indicated that there was a high negative, significant correlation between test anxiety and overall achievement test with the value of -0.360 . As a result, it can be concluded that L2 learners' test anxiety is negatively related to overall achievement test. Actually, this finding concerning the relationship between anxiety and overall achievement converges with not only opinions pointed out much earlier but also studies done before. According to Tsui and Ng (2000) in their study, found the same results as Connor and Asenavage (1994). Rollinson, 1998 (cited in Rollinson, 2005) came to the conclusion that peer readers can provide helpful feedbacks. According to Yousefi (2010), "found that there were a significant negative correlation between the academic achievement test and test anxiety" (p. 102). In addition, Jean T. Stephenson Wilson (2006) also found "a statistically significant correlation between TAS and the scores on the achievement test, but the association the reported was lower than that encountered in the current thesis. Students may have been slightly less anxious than those in the present study, because they were in the different atmosphere and culture. The null hypotheses advanced from the research questions were rejected and it was found that test anxiety correlated negatively with overall achievement test

in general. Consequently, it is worthwhile to explore how prevalent foreign language test anxiety is among foreign language learners and how foreign language test anxiety might influence foreign language overall achievement test at the end of term. It is remarkable that both were high ability students and, incidentally, female. A major contribution of the current research has been the exploration of foreign language anxiety and its relationships to overall proficiency in the foreign language, and not only in four skills ability assessed on one test. Another important contribution has been the examination of a wealth of personal data pertaining to the students that might shed light on the complex relationship among achievement test performance and foreign language classroom anxiety".

Conclusion

The result of this study is that there was a statistically significant difference between the relationship of test anxiety and achievement test on the Iranian EFL learners' middle school. When one variable will be rising the other variables decrease. Descriptive statistic showed that they have inverse relation and therefore exposure to situations in which anxiety can be happened and pupils practiced and actualized is probably required to successfully increase these learners; overall L2 achievement test. Allotting a considerable amount of class time to anxiety may not be reasonable because teachers already have enough work to do trying to cover their pre specified (usually integrative) syllabuses.

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