

Why do the Tests Make us Anxious?

By

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Abstract

This study aimed to determine students' perceived sources of test anxiety. Participants in this study are Turkish university students. The sample consisted of 116 (37%) male and 196 (63%) female students aged 22 to 37 years (Mean: 26,7). To collect data, a questionnaire was used. According to the findings, the most important cause of test anxiety is fear of failure (N=60). Fear of being looked down upon is the other important cause of test anxiety (N=47). 19% of participants reported that test anxiety was due to insufficiency. Approximately 17% of students reported that tests are very important in their life. Responsibility for family and time are other important causes of test anxiety. 15% of the participants reported that uncertainty of test content is important for test anxiety. According to 11% of participants reported that test anxiety was due to uncertainty of test format. Approximately 10% of participants reported that fear of marking the wrong answer is a cause of test anxiety. Students indicated that fear of subjective evaluation and fear of forgetting what they know is other causes of test anxiety. 3,64% of the students reported that test anxiety was due to a disorder. Nearly 2,5% of students indicated that negative test experience and no prior experience are other causes of test anxiety. Another important result of this study was that girls had more test anxiety than boys. Results were discussed with other research related to test anxiety. Similar results were obtained with literature.

Keywords: *anxiety, test anxiety, test emotions, tests, fear of failure*

1. Introduction

Test anxiety is a negative concept in a learning-teaching environment. According to Spielberger, Anton and Bedell (1976), test anxiety is a situation-specific form of trait anxiety. Test anxiety is a subjective emotional state, experienced before or during a specific evaluation, that relates to the act of completing the evaluation itself, the threat of failing, and any associated negative consequences (Bonnaccio and Reeve, 2010, Zeidner, 1998; Pekrun et al., 2004). Reviews on the issue of test anxiety illustrate that the effects of test anxiety on students' lives could be educational, professional and emotional. The prevailing fact is that test anxiety is a widespread problem for many students around the world, particularly for female students (Asghari, Abdul Kadir, Elias, and Baba, 2012). According to Bonaccio and Reeve (2010), there are three broad domains of perceptions of sources of test anxiety: students' perceptions of the test, their self-perceptions, and their perceptions of the test-taking situation. Whereas students perceive test-related properties as most anxiety-inducing, self-perceptions appear to be more strongly empirically related to the level of test anxiety they experience.

In the literature there are several studies about students' perceived sources of test anxiety. Several studies show that fear of failure is the most of the important cause of test anxiety (Hagvet and Benson, 1997; Mills and Blankstein, 2000; Stoeber, Feast and Hayward, 2009). In the literature, importance of tests is a cause of test anxiety. In the study carried out by Hanna and Mekaela (2013), it was shown that a majority of the pupils seemed to perceive the test as rather important and claimed that they put a lot of effort into the test. There was, however, a fair group of students who did not perceive the test as very important. Many students also reported that they felt anxious before and during the test. Similar result was obtained in Bonaccio and Reeve's (2010) study. In Turkey, in the study carried by Alyaprak (2006), the results have shown that there is a positive and meaningful correlation between test anxiety and the importance given to the exam.

Time limit is another cause of test anxiety. In a study conducted by Onwuegbuzie and Seaman (1995), the performance of students who completed a statistics examination under a time limit was compared with that of students under no time limit. Another purpose of the study was to determine whether students with high or low statistics test anxiety were affected differentially by these two examination conditions. Twenty-six graduate students who were enrolled in an intermediate-level statistics course were randomly assigned to the two examination groups, timed or untimed. Both low- and high-anxious students performed better on the final course examination under the untimed condition than under the timed condition.

According to many research results, academic insufficiency and test anxiety are related concepts. When the insufficiency was high, test anxiety increased. (Cassady and Johnson, 2002; DordiNejat et al., 2011; Goetz, Preckel, Zeidner and Schleyer, 2008; Hembree, 1988; Hong, 1998; Jing, 2007; Oostedam and Meijer, 2003; Peleg, 2009; Sarason, 1984, Onyeizugbo, 2010; Putwain and Symes, 2010; Seipp, 1991; Schwarzer, Mueller and Greenglass, 1999; Zeidner and Schleyer, 1999).

Family and test anxiety have been the subject of some research studies. These studies found that test anxiety and family factors are related to each other (Ahlawat, 1989, Boyacıoğlu, 2010; Peleg, 2002; Popko, Klingman and Nahhas, 2003; Yıldırım, 2008). In a study conducted by Yıldırım (2008) in Turkey, it was found that mother's level of education, frequency of quarrels in the family, family projecting familial issues onto the student, family not trusting the student, family pressuring the students to study, and family not allowing the student to partake in social activities all significantly influenced students' levels of test anxiety. On the other hand, the number of persons in the family, father's level of education, family income, and family's level of religiosity did not have a significant effect on test anxiety. In a research carried out by Alyaprak (2006), the relation between the income level of the family and test anxiety is examined and it was found that the lower income gets, the higher is examined and the result have shown that if the educational status of the father is low, test anxiety is higher. However, there is a meaningful relation between the test anxiety and education status of the mother. Similar result was obtained in Civil (2008)'s study. In Erzen & Odacı (2014)'s study the results have been showed that test anxiety was differentiated with regard to gender, school type, region and family income level. In Duman (2008)'s study, the correlation between state anxiety levels of students and protective / demanding attitude and authoritarian attitude, between trait anxiety levels of students and protective / demanding attitude and authoritarian attitude, between test anxiety levels of students and protective / demanding attitude and authoritarian attitude was found to be as positive and meaningful. The correlation between state anxiety levels of students and democratic attitude and between trait anxiety levels of students and democratic attitude was found to be as negative and meaningful. Also, It was determined that there was a meaningful differentiation between levels of trait anxiety of students based on the marital status of the parents, the monthly revenue of the parents, the ranking of the students among the brothers / sisters.

In some researches correlation between personality and test anxiety was examined (Dündar, Yapıcı & Topçu, 2008; Peleg Popko, 2004). According to Dündar, Yapıcı & Topçu (2008), test anxiety score of students who has personality general harmony, social harmony and personality harmony scores are low, is higher than students who has personality general harmony, social harmony and personality harmony scores are high. There is negative significant relationship between personality general harmony with test anxiety of students.

In a lot of research, it have been found that test anxiety differentiated according to gender (Başoğlu, 2007; Bonaccio & Reeve, 2010; Cassady and Jhonson, 2002; Chapel, et al., 2005; Civil, 2008; Çakmak, 2007; Daymaz, 2012; Erarslan, 2010; Ergene, 2011; Erzen & Odacı, 2014; Duman, 2008; Ginter, Scalise, Mcknight & Miller, 1982; Hembree, 1988; Hanımoğlu, 2010; Pazarlı, 2009; Yalçınkaya, 2011; Zeidner, 1998).

According to several studies, test anxiety and test performance are related concepts. Cheng and others (2014) examined test-takers' motivation, test anxiety, and test performance. The results have been shown

complex interrelationships of test-takers' motivation and test anxiety in their test performances. Differences in motivation and test anxiety emerged with regard to social variables (i.e., test importance to stakeholders and test purposes). Further, motivation and test anxiety, along with personal variables (i.e., gender and age), were associated with test performance. Von der, Nathaniel and Witmer (2004) examined the relationship between student anxiety about high-stakes testing and their subsequent test performance. At the end of the study, it was found that test anxiety was a significant predictor of test performance when controlling for other expected predictors of test performance, including school performance as measured by grade point average. Similar results were obtained in studies conducted by Ainleke (2012) and Dor-diNejad et al. (2011).

The literature related to test anxiety was examined, test anxiety have many dimension. Understanding students' perceived sources of test anxiety is important because they provide potential trait-based and situational explanations for the wide variety of anxiety-related reactions to tests that individuals manifest (Bonnaccio and Reeve, 2010). Therefore, studies on the sources of test anxiety are very important for taking measures to reduce test anxiety. The purpose of this study is to determine causes of students' test anxiety, according to their perceptions.

2. Method

The participant group was composed of 312 Turkish university students. The sample consisted of 116 (37%) male and 196 (63%) female students aged 22 to 37 years (Mean: 26,7). To collect data, a questionnaire was used. It included questions about test anxiety sources and demographic questions (age, gender). Students were asked to describe all of the causes of their test anxiety. In the study carried out by Bonnaccio and Reeve (2010), researchers left the question completely open-ended and they did not provide students with any framework. This situation was consistent with the tenets of grounded theory, which states that individualized experiences should be understood from the point of view of the individual and not by asking people to fit their experiences into a schema imposed by the researcher.

This study is a survey research. Therefore, descriptive analysis was conducted on the data collected and a frequency table is presented in the study. Result was presented by a bar chart.

3. Results

This study aimed to determine the causes of test anxiety. Research findings collected from 312 students are given in Figure 1.

According to the findings, the most important cause of test anxiety is fear of failure (N=60). Fear of being looked down upon is the other important cause of test anxiety (N=47).

19% of participants reported that test anxiety was due to insufficiency (N=47). Approximately 17% of students reported that tests are very important in their life (N=43). Responsibility for family and time are other important causes of test anxiety (N=42; N=37). 15% of the participants reported that uncertainty of test content is important causes (N=36). According to 11% of participants reported that test anxiety was due to uncertainty of test format (N=26). Approximately 10% of participants reported that fear of marking the wrong answer is a cause of test anxiety (N=25). Students indicated that fear of subjective evaluation and fear of forgetting what they know is other causes of test anxiety (N=17). This source was obtained only for girls. 3,64% of the students reported that test anxiety was due to a disorder (N=9). Nearly 2,5% of students indicated that negative test experience and no prior experience are other causes of test anxiety (N=6, N=5). The other causes of test anxiety are: authoritative educators (N=36), incomprehensible questions (N=9), hunger (N=4), absenteeism (N=4), uncertainty of evaluation criteria (N=2), fear of missing questions (N=2), being observed by invigilator (N=1), long questions (N=1), stress caused by

peers (N=1) , and tests beginning with difficult questions (N=1). Another important result of this study was that girls had more test anxiety than boys.

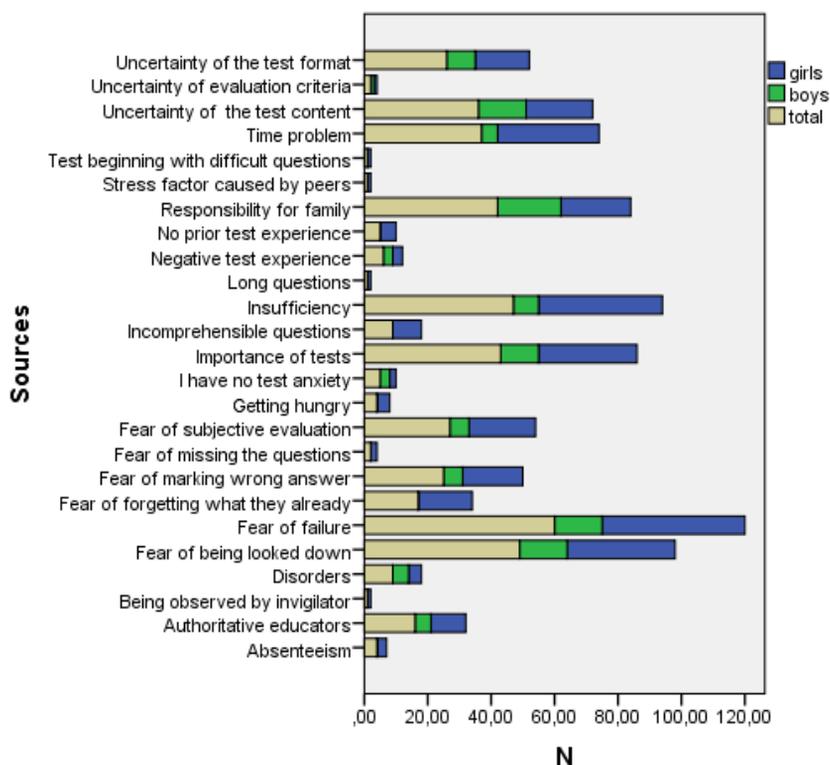


Figure 1. Students' perceived sources of test anxiety

4. Conclusions

According to the findings, the most important cause of test anxiety is fear of failure (N=60). Similar results were obtained in Hagvet and Benson's (1997) study. Fear of being looked down upon is the other important cause of test anxiety (N=47). According to Stoeber, Feast and Hayward (2009), self-oriented and socially prescribed perfectionism are both associated with test anxiety. These findings indicate that self-oriented and socially prescribed perfectionism show differential correlations with different dimensions of test anxiety. Similar results were obtained in Mills and Blankstein's (2000) study.

According to the findings of present research, one of the causes of test anxiety is insufficiency. In many studies, similar results were obtained (Cassady and Johnson, 2002; DordiNejat et al., 2011; Goetz, Preckel, Zeidner and Schleyer, 2008; Hembree, 1988; Hong, 1998; Jing, 2007; Oostedam and Meijer, 2003; Peleg, 2009; Sarason, 1984, Onyeizugbo, 2010; Putwain & Symes, 2010; Seipp, 1991; Schwarzer, Mueller and Greenglass, 1999; Zeidner and Schleyer, 1999). Importance of tests is another cause of test anxiety. (N=43). Approximately 17% of students reported that tests are very important in their life. According to them, tests are a determinant factor of their future. Bonaccio and Reeve (2010) found that 40.3% of participants reported that tests are an important determinant of course grades or GPA; 25,4% of participants reported that tests have a direct impact on their progression in their program; 9% of participants reported that tests have a direct impact on their job search success. In the studies conducted by Alyprak

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(2006), Erzen and Odacı (2014) and Civil (2008), students of low socioeconomic levels have more test anxiety than students of other socioeconomic levels.

Responsibility for family is another important cause of test anxiety. In the literature, many findings showed that family factor affects test anxiety (Ahlawat, 1989, Peleg, 2002; Popko, Klingman and Nahhas, 2003). In a study conducted by Popko, Klingman and Nahhas (2003), it was found that test anxiety negatively correlated with a supportive family environment and positively correlated with an authoritarian one.

According to the findings, time is another cause of test anxiety. Similar results were obtained in Onwuegbuzie and Seaman's (1995) study. Results showed that both low and high-anxious students performed better on the final course examination under the untimed condition than under the timed condition.

15% of the participants reported that uncertainty of test content is another cause of test anxiety. According to 11% of participants, uncertainty of test format is another cause of test anxiety. In a study conducted by Bonaccio and Reeve (2010) 16,4% of participants reported that uncertainty of test content is a cause of test anxiety, 9% of participants also reported uncertainty of test format is another cause of test anxiety. According to the results, uncertainty of test content and uncertainty of test format are important causes of test anxiety.

Approximately 10% of participants reported that fear of marking the wrong answer is a cause of test anxiety. Students indicated that fear of subjective evaluation and fear of forgetting what they know is other causes of test anxiety. In some studies, the results showed that test anxiety can be caused by negative events, like memory interruption (Keogh and French, 2001; Peleg, 2011). Nearly 7% of students indicated that a cause of test anxiety is lack of self-confidence. In the study conducted by Peleg (2009), self-esteem is a negative connotation of test anxiety.

3,64% of the students reported that test anxiety was due to a disorder. In the study conducted by Bonaccio and Reeve (2010), 9% of students indicated that physical /mental illness or exhaustion are causes of test anxiety. According to Aysan et al. (2001) stress felt from tests can have negative psychological effects. These psychological effects are: coronary heart disease, respiratory distress syndrome, suppressed immune system functioning and hypertension. According to Keogh and French (2001), students even consider suicide due to test results.

Nearly 2,5% of students indicated that negative test experience and no prior experience are other causes of test anxiety. In a study conducted by Bonaccio and Reeve (2010), participants reported that reasons for test anxiety include no prior experience and prior poor performance in content area.

Another important result of this study was that girls had more test anxiety than boys. This result is consistent with literature (Başoğlu, 2007; Bonaccio & Reeve, 2010; Cassady and Jhonson, 2002; Chapel, et al., 2005; Civil, 2008; Çakmak, 2007; Daymaz, 2012; Erarslan, 2010; Ergene, 2011; Erzen & Odacı, 2014; Duman, 2008; Ginter, Scalise, Mcknight & Miller, 1982; Hembree, 1988; Hanımoğlu, 2010; Pazarlı, 2009; Yalçınkaya, 2011; Zeidner, 1998).

5. Recommendations

In this research, data were collected from students attending to teacher certificate program. This research has been limited with a research group. Reasons of test anxiety can be researched in different groups. In this research, data was collected by a questionnaire. So it can be use different measurement tools to examine test anxiety. Based on the findings of this research, for reducing test anxiety, it can be suggested that programs should be organized to increase test anxiety. According to the findings, time is another cause of test anxiety. If it possible, it should give enough time for exams. Participants reported that uncer-

tainty of test content and test format are cause of test anxiety. Students should be informed about test content and test format.

In this research approximately 10% of participants reported that fear of marking the wrong answer is a cause of test anxiety. It should be prepared detailed test directions in order to reduce wrong answers. Questions should be written understandably. Fear of being looked down upon and responsibility for family are other important causes of test anxiety. Because of this reason, families should be informed about test anxiety and its negative effects on students by teachers.

Approximately 17% of students reported that tests are very important in their life. Students indicated that uncertainty of evaluation criteria, fear of subjective evaluation and fear of forgetting what they know is other causes of test anxiety. Also, students should be informed about evaluation criterias. Nearly 2,5% of students indicated that negative test experience and no prior experience are other causes of test anxiety. If an unknown test format will be used, it should be explained by teacher. The other causes of test anxiety are: authoritative educators, hunger, being observed by invigilator, long questions, and tests beginning with difficult questions. Therefore, students should be allowed by teachers to resolve their needs, invigilators should not stand near a student; it should not be used long questions in tests. Tests should not be started with difficult questions.

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