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The effect of test anxiety on primary stage students' writing fluency

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Abstract

This study aimed to examine the effect of test anxiety on the students' performance, especially their writing fluency. The statistics were used for one study group in the current study to investigate the relationship between test anxiety and writing fluency. The researcher randomly nominated twenty-five primary-stage students for the study (N = 25), utilizing various tools to collect data and to measure the impact of test anxiety on writing fluency. The study collected its data through the use of a writing fluency test, a writing fluency rubric, and a test anxiety scale. The data was quantitatively and qualitatively analyzed using the correlational design. The quantitative data was interpreted using the (SPSS) program, especially the descriptive statistics such as mean and standard deviation. While describing and comparing the students' results to find reasonable rationale during the qualitative analysis, the study findings confirmed that there is a reverse correlation between test anxiety and the primary stage students' writing fluency. In other words, there is a negative correlation between writing fluency and test anxiety.

Key words: test anxiety, writing fluency

هدفت هذه الدراسة إلى فحص تأثير قلق الامتحانات على أداء الطلاب، وخاصة على طلاقة الكتابة لديهم. تم تطبيق العديد من الإحصائيات لمجموعة دراسة واحدة في الدراسة الحالية لاستقصاء العلاقة بين قلق الامتحانات والطلاقة الكتابية. قامت الباحثة باختيار عشوائياً خمسة وعشرين طالب من المرحلة الابتدائية للدراسة (العدد = 25)، باستخدام أدوات مختلفة لجمع البيانات وقياس تأثير قلق الامتحانات على الطلاقة الكتابية. جمعت الدراسة بياناتها من خلال استخدام اختبار الطلاقة الكتابية، ومقياس لتقييم الطلاقة الكتابية، واستطلاع رأي لقياس قلق الامتحانات، تم تحليل البيانات كمياً ونوعاً باستخدام تصميم الارتباط. تم تفسير البيانات الكمية باستخدام برنامج (SPSS) وخاصة الإحصاء الوصفي مثل المتوسط الحسابي والانحراف المعياري. أثناء وصف نتائج الطلاب ومقارنتها لإيجاد مبرر معقول أثناء تحليل التحليل النوعي، أكدت نتائج الدراسة أن هناك علاقة عكسية بين قلق الامتحانات والطلاقة الكتابية لدى طلاب المرحلة الابتدائية. بمعنى آخر، هناك علاقة سلبية بين الطلاقة الكتابية وقلق الامتحانات.

الكلمات الرئيسية: قلق الامتحانات والطلاقة الكتابية

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Introduction

Exams are important instruments for determining the student's educational performance and various academic achievements, but they frequently create significant amounts of worry and panic. Indeed, the majority of students start to experience worry as the tests get closer. Anxiety is a typical and expected reaction to circumstances. Although test anxiety is not always abnormal or neurotic, it can become so severe for some students during particular examination settings that it is clearly seen as a form of mental abnormality. It is actually referred to as "Test Anxiety." Many different sorts of odd and neurotic concerns are included under the umbrella term "test anxiety," which is widely used in this context.

According to Alemi & Birjandi (2010), language-learning anxiety is one form of anxiety, one kind of anxiety. It is a particular type of tension that is related to linguistic situations and is unrelated to the other symptoms of tension. Test anxiety is a dangerous subtype of this type of anxiety that can be addressed and given treatment options to reduce or eradicate. Test anxiety, according to Krishnaswamy, Ping, and Subramanian (2008), is a reaction to specific risks that occur in an exam environment.

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Fear of achieving a failing score or using the incorrect words in the wrong order can contribute to test anxiety (Tanveer, 2007). Test anxiety is compared to the "disabling stress" that typically leads to a series of negative responses from the students due to evaluating conditions and additional tasks that have been imposed for the final examinations. The students feel that the learning requirements are challenging to complete. According to the latest pieces of research, students who feel uneasiness during tests have problems with their cognitive memory and social interactions (Glade, Valentiner and Holzman, 2016).

The argument made by Barterian, Carlson, Goforth, and Segool (2013) admits that test anxiety involves physiological, somatic, and interpersonal reactions to a subpar or unconvincing presentation in formal settings, such as the test platform, is another concern. Test anxiety makes it difficult to use terminology from a second or foreign language, especially while writing. Writing is thought to be the most popular approach for assessing students' displays of English, especially in Arab countries (Salem, 2013, p. 1). Writing is a wonderful way for students to express their ideas and reflections without having to work side by side. As a result, researchers should take care of it.

According to Khoii (2011), writing helps pupils develop their lexical resources, grammatical structures, and figures of speech. Additionally, writing proficiency encourages students to use the language confidently. Also, writing gives them the opportunity to delve deeper and express themselves more openly than what they have been properly instructed to say. It is important that writing inspires students to connect deeply with foreign languages. Despite the clear necessity of writing fluency and its undeniable importance, writing fluency may not be significantly improved due to various test anxiety backwash effects on writing. Fear of writing tests may result from prior incompetence, or it may be an innate dread of disappointment. Kara (2013) mentioned, as a consequence,

"a kind of writing anxiety resulting from a concern of disappointment."

According to numerous pieces of research in the field of English writing instruction, writing-associated test anxiety is a key element that affects the performance and perception of writing among students. As a result of the multiple challenges the students face, many ESL students may experience stress or lose their intrinsic motivation, which can eventually lead them to abandon writing altogether. Al-Sawalha and Foo (2013) stated that students who have high levels of test anxiety might consequently struggle when learning a new language.

Context of the Problem

Regarding the English examination stance in Egypt, based on the researcher's experience in teaching English as a foreign language in primary schools, the researcher found that there was a kind of lack in meaning construction, lack of self-expression, lack of communication in English in and out of the classroom, and poor performance during the test was observed.

Rao (2007) tracked students' writing performance on several English tests and found that students had very low levels of writing proficiency. Students with high test anxiety make mistakes related to subject-verb agreement, difficulty with constructing proper sentences, word order, correct punctuation, lack of logical ordering of ideas, and other writing fluency deficiencies. Furthermore, it is essential to highlight the fact that, in some conditions, fear may be seen as a normal response to a genuine threat (Headely and Campbell, 2013).

According to Daly (2011), language anxiety may result from test obscurity and strangeness. Additionally, Chamberlain, Daly, and Spalding (2011) came to the conclusion that test anxiety occurs in formal settings, such as the testing environment. They added that higher anxiety levels might decline if the mental balance is disturbed. Additionally, test anxiety is a type of anxiety that manifests during official exams, and as a result, this worry prevents

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the students from being able to demonstrate their true levels of proficiency (Kandenir, 2013).

Statement of the Problem

Owing to the exam-focused environment and test anxiety, Egyptian students' performances reveal areas of inadequacy in their ideas' construction, accuracy, and organization. The researcher aims to investigate how test anxiety affects primary stage students' ability to write fluently in English during tests and how it affects their writing production.

Study Questions

1. To what extent can test anxiety affect primary-stage students' writing fluency?
2. How can primary-stage students' test anxiety be measured?
3. What are the possible solutions that can be suggested to help the target pupils overcome the problem?

Study Design

This study used one group to conduct a correlational design. The group was exposed to a test anxiety scale and a writing test as a way of gathering data.

Study Variables

1. The independent variable: Test anxiety among primary-stage students is the independent variable in this study.

2. The dependent variable: The effect of test anxiety on the student's writing fluency among primary-stage students is the dependent variable.

Study Instruments

Study tools comprised the following:

- 1-A writing test to evaluate the effect of test anxiety on the writing fluency of the students
- 2- Writing rubric scale with its validity and reliability
- 3-A test anxiety scale that is written with the appropriate language level to suit the students at that stage

Study Method

In this correlational study design, the association between test anxiety and the writing fluency of primary-stage students was measured and analyzed. This study examined two different variables. Test anxiety in ESL learners was the independent variable, while writing fluency was the dependent variable. The study also examined whether or not there was a correlation between primary-stage students' test anxiety and their writing fluency. 25 students from the sixth primary stage were also randomly nominated for this study's population. A quantitative analysis was employed on the data utilized in this study. This data was gathered by administering a writing fluency test to the students to evaluate their writing fluency and giving them a test anxiety scale to measure their self-reported test anxiety.

Study Findings

Test Anxiety Scale Results

From a group of six primary-stage students, twenty-five participants who were nearly the same age were randomly selected and given the test anxiety scale. Descriptive statistics are used to examine the test anxiety outcomes. The findings are categorized into three groups: test anxiety mean, test anxiety fear mean, and test anxiety incapability mean. The findings indicated the severity of test anxiety among the primary-stage pupils.

The subsequent figures and tables exhibit the findings of the test anxiety scale:

Table 1: Primary Stage Students' Test Anxiety Mean

Test Anxiety	Mean	Std. Deviation
Question 1	3.50	1.896
Question 2	3.31	1.904
Question 3	3.70	1.725
Question 4	3.95	2.051
Question 5	3.61	1.781
Question 6	3.61	2.043

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Question 7	4.40	2.021
Question 8	4.16	2.267
Question 9	3.84	1.772
Question 10	3.16	2.075
Question 11	4.40	1.705
Question 12	3.64	2.289
Question 13	4.50	2.182
Question 14	3.92	1.706
Total	3.84	

The mean score of test anxiety for students in the primary stages is 3.84, as shown in Table 1. It is evident that the fear mean, which is shown in statements 6, 7, and the negative thoughts, which are given in statements 8 and 13, contribute to the majority of discomfort in the primary stage students. According to the results of the scale, statements 3, 9, and 12 highlight the fact that primary stage students were more likely to critically think in a negative way during tests. The display of table (1) and figure (1) reveals that the incapability mean had a 3.16 mean score, which was approximately the lowest average mean score in statement number 10. Additionally, the mean scores for statements 5 and 6 on the scale of test anxiety were identical, with a mean score of 3.61.

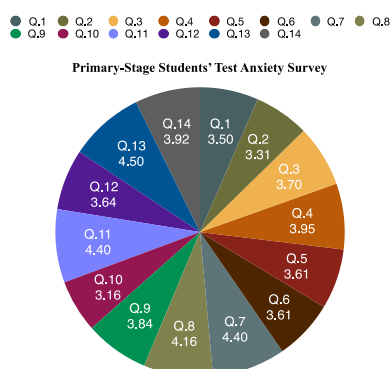


Figure 1: Primary Stage Students' Test Anxiety Mean

Table 2: Primary Stage Students' Test Anxiety Fear Mean

Test Anxiety Scale	Mean	S.D
Question 4	3.95	2.051
Question 5	3.61	1.781
Question 6	3.61	2.043
Question 7	4.40	2.021
Question 10	3.16	2.075
Fear Mean	3.73	

Table (2) displays the regularity and ratio of the frequency of every statement, emphasizing the rate of the mean score alongside the value of the standard deviation of every statement in the scale. Examining the data of the test anxiety scale in depth, statements 4,5,6,7 and 10 are intended to evaluate and measure the worry level and its amount between the primary stage students.

Table 2 demonstrates that 56% of the participants experience test anxiety symptoms, such as restlessness and gazing around the classroom, during exams. Their educational achievement may deteriorate as a result of the attention bias caused by some of these symptoms. Additionally, 40% of the participants acknowledged that they frequently become anxious when they observe their peers exit the examination room before them. This is among the telltale signs

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of having severe test anxiety, which anyone might experience before, during, or after an exam. First, from the table presented in the previous section, it is clear that 28% of the participants exhibit severe physical signs of test anxiety, such as biting their nails and chewing their pens.

Also illustrating the fact that statement (7) had the highest weighted mean (4.40) in the test anxiety fear mean in the figure below.

Figure 2: Primary Stage Students' Test Anxiety Fear Mean

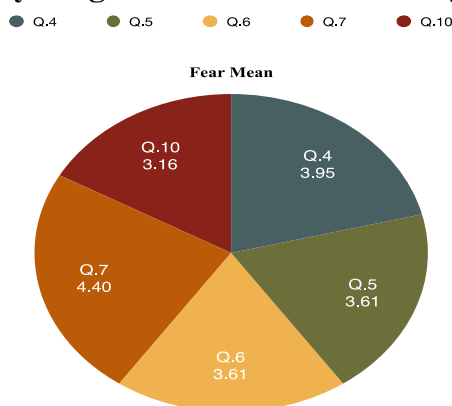


Table 3: Primary Stage Students' Test Anxiety Incapability Mean

Test Anxiety Scale	Mean	S.D
Question 1	3.50	1.896
Question 11	4.40	1.705
Question 14	3.92	1.706
Total Mean	3.94	

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The amount of test anxiety-related impairment among students in the primary stage is shown in table 3 and its accompanying figure. The frequency and proportion of each statement are shown in table 3, together with the mean and standard deviation of each scale item. In-depth analysis of the data of the scale's results reveals that statements 1, 11, and 14 are intended to evaluate and quantify the incapability factor and its severity among elementary stage students. The statistics provided above reveal that 44% of participants experience anxiety whenever the test is only for a brief period of time.

This indicates that tests with a limited time restriction can heighten anxiety levels in elementary students, which may result in a decline in both their educational achievement and writing fluency.

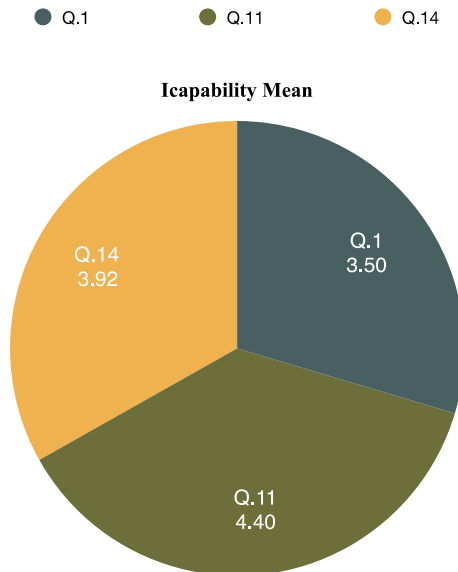


Figure 3: Primary Stage Students' Test Anxiety Incapability Mean

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Conclusions

This study attempted to investigate how test anxiety affected the students' writing and English language skills. The following conclusions were drawn based on quantitative analysis of the data that was triggered:

- It is established that test anxiety has a detrimental impact on students' overall writing fluency.
- It has been established that test anxiety contributes to decreased writing fluency performance among primary-stage students.
- It was shown that test anxiety was related to the students' inability to write fluently.

Discussion of Results

The interpretations provided in this study were based mainly on the findings. First, the overall mean score of the students' test anxiety revealed that the majority of sixth-primary stage students have significant levels of test anxiety. Additionally, the test anxiety scale employed in this study, includes two components, which identify two categories of test anxiety: fear, and incapacity. According to the statistics of the participants' scores, the majority of the students reported suffering from incapacity due to test anxiety.

Recommendations and Suggestions for Further Research

- Academic institutions and educational professionals may conduct further research into the effectiveness of using positive psychology to reduce test anxiety in EFL classrooms and improve students' writing fluency. It is suggested that a similar longitudinal study be carried out on a larger population, covering numerous psychological elements that affect academic success, in order to generalize the findings and reap bigger gains. It is also suggested that the study be carried out for university bachelor's degrees in order to evaluate the effects of a positive psychology-based strategy on a random

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selection and to further contrast outcomes. The views and perspectives that students had after using the study's treatment applications on other academic disciplines should also be thoroughly and qualitatively investigated. In order to promote the growth of interaction abilities and literacy awareness,

The following suggestion could be very beneficial:

- Analyzing if the exam's format contributes to rising English language test anxiety.
- Examining the impact of test anxiety on speaking fluency
- Investigating the possibility of how emotional intelligence can be used to enhance teaching and learning outcomes.
- Designing a training program based on educational psychology to address the issues related to education.

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