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Test Anxiety: Prevalence and Correlates

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Abstract

Academic success can be measured in various terms and academic grades or Grade Point Average (GPA) obtained in test is important objective measures of it. Though GPA at any level of education is important, school GPA is much important in that it determines career choice as well as human success (Bacon and Bean, 2006). School GPA is determined by various factors and test anxiety is one of the most reported factors. Test anxiety is a type of anxiety that students experience when they encounter test situation. Researchers have established test anxiety as one of the pervasive conditions contributing in academic performance and success. Test anxiety interacts with many other variables like academic achievement motivation, self-efficacy, emotional intelligence and adjustment. Present study was aimed at investigating prevalence and correlates of test anxiety. This study was conducted in 38 students studying in tenth grade at one private and one government owned school of Bhaktapur district, Nepal. Test anxiety inventory developed by Spielberger (1980), Academic Achievement Motivation Test developed by Sharma (2006), Generalized Self Efficacy scale developed by Schwarzer and Jerusalem (1995), Brief Emotional Intelligence Scale developed by Davies, Lane, Devonport and Scott (2010) and Adjustment Inventory for School Students (Sinha and Singh, 2013) were used to measure test anxiety and related constructs. Tests were at first translated in Nepali by following rigorous translation process. Result of the study showed that 76.3% of the students were suffering from some level of test anxiety. Result further showed that private school students had significantly high test anxiety as compared to government school students. Also, test anxiety did not differ significantly with respect to sex, type of family, academic achievement motivation, self-efficacy, emotional intelligence and adjustment.

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Keywords

Test anxiety; Adjustment; Self-efficacy; Emotional intelligence; Academic achievement motivation

Introduction

Academic success, which York, Gibson and Rankin (2015) defined as an inclusive concept that includes academic achievement, attainment of learning objectives, acquisition of desired skills and competencies, satisfaction, persistence, and post college performance, is one of the important life goals for each student. York, Gibson and Rankin (2015) pointed out that Grade Point Average (GPA) is the most commonly used measure of academic success. It is considered as objective and reliable measure. GPA is not only important because high school GPA affects college GPA (Hassan and Al-Razgan, 2016) but also because it influences other life outcomes such as job performance (Roth *et al.*, 1996 as cited in Mussoab *et al.*, 2013) and human success (Bacon

and Bean, 2006). Students' GPA is influenced by numerous factors like intelligence (Mackintosh 1998, cited in Deary, Strand, Smith and Fernandes, 2007), emotional intelligence (Zahed-Babelan and Moenikia, 2010) study habits (Siahi and Maiyo, 2015), interest, motivation (Tella, 2007), performance self-efficacy (Richardson, Abraham, and Bond, 2012), mental status immediately before and during exam, and test anxiety (Bhatta, 2012; Yousefi, Redzun, Mansor, Juhari and Talib, 2009). However, test anxiety is one of the most common factors reported in literature that heavily influences GPA and academic learning. Test anxiety is a multidimensional sign described as a group of phenomenological, physiological and behavioural reaction to appear with possible negative consequences or failure in exam or similar evaluative situations (Zeidner, 1998). It influences students before, during and after exam. It is a common, treatable condition that may lower student performance up to 10% of the school-aged population (Erford and Moore-Thomas, 2004 as cited in Cizek and Burg, 2006). Studies have shown that 18 percent of college students are handicapped by test anxiety and additional 16 percent may be somewhat handicapped by moderately high test anxiety (Hill and Wigfield, 1984 as cited in Driscoll *et al.*, 2005).

Effect of test anxiety is thought to be high in high stake situation and 10th grade exit examination or Secondary Education Examination (SEE) is one of the high stake situations for Nepalese students. Bhattarai's (2014) claim that suicide is extreme negative consequence of failure in tenth grade justifies the importance of this exam in student's life. Formerly called School Leaving Certificate (SLC) or 'Iron Gate', SEE is one of the important tests that affect student's career choice. Better grades in SEE make students eligible to choose science subject which open the door to study of subjects like medicine and engineering. Poor grades, on other hand, are indicator that students have no choices other than studying subjects that has been stigmatized as subjects for underachievers. Student in lower extreme are even forced to pursue vocational training courses irrespective of their interest. This might have created enormous mental pressure on students contributing in test anxiety. Thus, it becomes necessary to explore prevalence of test anxiety among students who are to appear for SEE. Though, prevalence has been explored in some countries, there is huge variation between prevalence measured in various parts. Researchers have reported test anxiety in as low as 16 percent (Putwain and Daly, 2014) and as high as 38.5 percent (Gerwing *et al.*, 2015). In Nepal, no prevalence based studies have been conducted till date. Thus, present study was focused in exploring prevalence of test anxiety in Nepalese context. Many researchers have outlined several correlates of test anxiety including emotional intelligence (Malik *et al.*, 2013; Khaledian, 2013), self-efficacy (Onyeizugbo, 2010; Koksal, 2009), achievement motivation (Chauhan, 2016) and study habits (Olaitan and Moroluyo, 2014; Ergene, 2011). Some of these variables do interact with test anxiety to produce impact on academic achievement while others might moderate the impact of test anxiety. Exploring prevalence of test anxiety and its correlates can provide insight into factors other than study that contribute for academic achievement of students. Thus, present study was focused on exploring prevalence of test anxiety and some of its correlates with background variables of the students.

Materials and Methods

This study was conducted in two schools of Bhaktapur district of Nepal. One school (Surya Deep Higher Secondary School) represented private school while Shanti Niketan School represented government owned schools. Twenty six students (13 male and 13 female) participated from Surya Deep Higher Secondary School while 12 (6 male and 6 female) accepted voluntary participation from Shanti Niketan School. Age of the students ranged from 14 to 18 with majority of students (25 out of 38) representing 16 years category. More than half of the students were from nuclear family (21 out of 38) followed by extended family (9) and joint family (8). Twenty-item Test Anxiety Inventory developed by Spielberger (1980) was used to measure prevalence of test anxiety of students. In Test Anxiety Inventory, response can be in four point scale ranging from almost never to almost always. Score of "1" is awarded for "almost never" while 2 is given for each "sometimes" response". Score of 3 is given for each "often" response and 4 is given for "almost always". Higher score indicates higher test anxiety. Cut-off scores developed by Dawood *et al.*, (2016) were used to categorize students in various levels of test anxiety. Correlates of test anxiety explored were: academic achievement motivation, adjustment, general self-efficacy and emotional intelligence.

Academic Achievement Motivation Test developed by Sharma (2006) which consisted 38 statements was used to measure level of academic achievement motivation and adjustment of students was measured through 60-item Adjustment Inventory for School Students (Sinha and Singh, 2013). In academic achievement motivation

test, subjects have to choose from two options. Score of 1 is given for matching desired response in each of the statements and higher score indicates better academic achievement. After calculation of score, all subjects can be categorized as high, average or low in academic achievement.

In Adjustment Inventory for School Students subject has to choose from "Yes" and "No" and score 1 is given for each matching response in desired response category. Lower score in this scale indicates better adjustment. This scale consists of three subscales namely; emotional adjustment, social adjustment and educational adjustment and score can be categorized in five levels (excellent, good, average, unsatisfactory and very unsatisfactory).

Ten item Generalized Self Efficacy scale developed by Schwarzer and Jerusalem (1995) was used to measure self-efficacy of students while ten-item Brief Emotional Intelligence Scale developed by Davies, Lane, Devonport and Scott (2010) was the test used to assess emotional intelligence of students.

Generalized Self Efficacy Scale is four-point scale in which subject should choose one of the following options; not at all true, hardly true, moderately true and exactly true. Score ranges from 1 to 4 for each of the respective responses and higher score indicates higher self-efficacy. Brief Emotional Intelligence Scale has five point Likert scale response pattern in which response ranges from strongly agree (score 1 is given) to strongly disagree (5). Lower score indicates better emotional Intelligence.

All tests were at first translated into Nepali and finalized after consulting with psychology expert from Tribhuvan University Teaching Hospital Mr. Suraj Shakya. Translated versions were then sent to two Nepali language experts Mr. Chaturbhuj Lal Das and Mr. Subhash Chandra Bhandari for correction. After finalizing corrections, two English language experts (Naveen Marasini and Prakash Neupane) were consulted for back translation. After matching translation and back translation, tests were finalized. With the help of official letter from Central Department of Psychology, Tribhuvan University, respective schools were requested for access to tenth grade students. After obtaining permission, students were thoroughly explained about research objectives, respective role of students and other ethical matters. Those who accepted request and granted consent were chosen as participants of current study.

Results and Discussion

Result of the study showed that majority of students had mild test anxiety (57.9%) while no students were having severe anxiety (Table 1). More than one sixth (18.4%) of the students showed moderate anxiety while 23.7% students experienced no anxiety at all. Thus, result of the study revealed that 76.3% of students were suffering from some level of test anxiety and no students had severe test anxiety. Result further revealed that all students who were having moderate anxiety belonged to the private schools. Similarly, more students from private schools (61.5%) were having mild anxiety as compared to those from government schools (50.0%). Also; none of the students were having severe test anxiety in both types of schools. Result of the study also showed that student differed significantly in test anxiety with respect to the type of schools they study [Fisher's exact test (2, 38) =7.96, $p<0.05$].

Students were scoring as low as 24 and as high as 57 in test anxiety but it differed significantly among the private (30-57) and public (24-49) school students. Mean score of 42.03 indicated that on an average student were having mild test anxiety.

Results of the study (Table 2) showed that more female compared to male were having moderate test anxiety (26.3% as compared to 10.5%) while more male compared to female were not experiencing test anxiety (31.6% as compared to 15.8%). Thus, 84.2% of female students were experiencing some level of test anxiety while 68.4% of the male students were experiencing so. Result of the study revealed that students did not differ significantly in test anxiety with sex as a variable (Fisher's exact test (2, 38) =2.193, $p>0.05$).Mean score of test anxiety was higher for female than male (M=44.42, SD= 8.57 and M=39.63, SD= 7.51 respectively) indicating that on an average female had higher test anxiety than male.

Table 3 showed that one third of the students (33.3%) from nuclear family were having no issues of test anxiety and this was highest number for students with no test anxiety.

Result also revealed that test anxiety was more common among students from extended family (88.9%) as and least common among those from nuclear family (66.7%). Result further showed that students were not differing significantly in test anxiety with respect to family type (Fisher's exact test (4, 38) =4.03, $p>0.05$).

With regard to achievement motivation level, 10 out of 38 students (26.32%) had low academic achievement motivation while 20 (52.63%) and 8 (21.05%) had average and high level of academic achievement motivation respectively (see Table 4). Table 4 also shows that all students having low academic achievement motivation had some level of test anxiety while more students with average as compared to high academic achievement motivation were suffering from some levels of test anxiety (70% as compared to 62.5%). Students did not differ in test anxiety significantly with respect to achievement motivation [Fisher's exact test (4, 38) = 6.75, p>0.05].

Following table 5 shows that 2 students (0.03) were having excellent adjustment while 18 students (47.37%) were having good overall adjustment (N=38). Six students (15.79%) were having unsatisfactory to very unsatisfactory adjustment and 12 students (31.58%) had average adjustment. Twelve out of 18 students (66.67%) with good adjustment showed some level of test anxiety. All students with unsatisfactory to very unsatisfactory adjustment were having mild to moderate test anxiety while 83.3% of students with average adjustment showed some level of test anxiety. Proportion of test anxious students was lowest for excellent adjustment group (50%) while highest for unsatisfactory and very unsatisfactory group (100%). Result of the study further showed that students did not differ significantly in test anxiety with respect to their adjustment levels [F(8,38)= 7.23, p>0.05].

Result of the study further showed that students secured as low as 14 and as high as 40 (highest obtainable score is 40) in self-efficacy. The mean of self-efficacy as 30.89 and median was 31. Schwarzer and Jerusalem (1995) suggested using median score to categorize students in low and high self-efficacy group. Considering this categorization, 47.37% of the students had high self-efficacy while remaining students were low in self-efficacy. Students scored 12 (lowest obtainable 10) to 31 (highest obtainable score 50) in emotional intelligence. Lower score in brief emotional intelligence scale is indication of high emotional intelligence. Mean score for emotional intelligence was 19.63 and median score was 19. Pearson's Correlation Coefficient was calculated to measure degree of relationship of test anxiety with self-efficacy and emotional intelligence. Result revealed that not significantly related to self-efficacy (r=-.25, p>0.05) and emotional intelligence (r=-.31, p>0.05). Even though not significant, higher test anxiety was related to lower self-efficacy and lower emotional intelligence.

Table.1 Test anxiety among students of private and Government schools

			School Type		Total
			Private	Government	
Test Anxiety Level	No Anxiety	Frequency	3	6	9
		%	11.5%	50.0%	23.7%
	Mild Anxiety	Frequency	16	6	22
		%	61.5%	50.0%	57.9%
	Moderate Anxiety	Frequency	7	0	7
		%	26.9%	0.0%	18.4%
Total		Frequency	26	12	38
		%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

Table.2 Test anxiety with sex as a variable

			Sex of Students		Total
			Male	Female	
Test Anxiety Level	No Anxiety	Frequency	6	3	9
		%	31.6%	15.8%	23.7%
	Mild Anxiety	Frequency	11	11	22
		%	57.9%	57.9%	57.9%
	Moderate Anxiety	Frequency	2	5	7
		%	10.5%	26.3%	18.4%
Total		Frequency	19	19	38
		%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

Table.3 Test anxiety and family type

			Family Type			Total
			Nuclear	Joint	Extended	
Test Anxiety Level	No Anxiety	Frequency	7	1	1	9
		%	33.3%	12.5%	11.1%	23.7%
	Mild Anxiety	Frequency	11	4	7	22
		%	52.4%	50.0%	77.8%	57.9%
	Moderate Anxiety	Frequency	3	3	1	7
		%	14.3%	37.5%	11.1%	18.4%
Total		Frequency	21	8	9	38
		%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

Table.4 Test anxiety and academic achievement motivation

			Achievement Motivation			Total
			Low	Average	High	
Test Anxiety Level	No Anxiety	Frequency	0	6	3	9
		%	0.0%	30.0%	37.5%	23.7%
	Mild Anxiety	Frequency	6	12	4	22
		%	60.0%	60.0%	50.0%	57.9%
	Moderate Anxiety	Frequency	4	2	1	7
		%	40.0%	10.0%	12.5%	18.4%
Total		Frequency	10	20	8	38
		%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

Table.5 Test anxiety and adjustment of students

			Level of Adjustment					Total
			Excellent	Good	Average	Unsatisfactory	Very Unsatisfactory	
Test Anxiety Level	No Anxiety	Frequency	1	6	2	0	0	9
		%	50.0%	33.3%	16.7%	0.0%	0.0%	23.7%
	Mild Anxiety	Frequency	1	8	9	3	1	22
		%	50.0%	44.4%	75.0%	60.0%	100.0%	57.9%
	Moderate Anxiety	Frequency	0	4	1	2	0	7
		%	0.0%	22.2%	8.3%	40.0%	0.0%	18.4%
Total		Frequency	2	18	12	5	1	38
		%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

Present study was aimed at exploring test anxiety among tenth grade students. This study was also focused at exploring difference in test anxiety with regard to various demographic and psychological variables. Result of the study showed that majority of students were having mild level of test anxiety and around one fifth of the students had moderate anxiety. None of the students had severe test anxiety. This was in contrary to finding of Dawdood *et al.*, (2016) who claimed that 50.9% of the students do suffer from moderate test anxiety while 14.4% of the students have severe test anxiety. Findings of present study also contradicted with that of Putwain and Daly (2014) who reported high test anxiety in some 16.4% of secondary school students. Other researchers also reported higher rate of moderate to severe test anxiety in students (For example, Yousefi *et al.*, 2009; Rezazadesh and Tavakoli, 2009; Bhatta, 2012). It is common practice in Nepal that schools are taking SEE very seriously and majority of schools are running rigorous classes even after courses are finished. Such a preparation might be one of the reasons why many students did not report moderate to severe anxiety.

Result of the study further showed that students of private schools were having significantly higher test anxiety compared to those studying in government

schools. Result was contrary to the findings of Akanbi (2013). Government schools are more liberal in grade promotion system whereas private schools are strict about this (Bhatta, 2005 as cited in Thapa, 2012). Also, students in government schools are usually from lower socio-economic cluster and many do not get proper attention from parents in their studies. Some of these students even have to work for earning. These might be reasons why students from government schools were having less interest and motivation in study thereby reducing importance of examination and anxiety. Result further showed that students did not differ significantly in test anxiety with respect to their sex. Result of present study contradicted to the findings of many previous studies (Rana and Mahmood, 2010; Erdem, 2007; Hashmat *et al.*, 2008) though other studies (Ndirangu, *et al.*, 2009; Olatoye, 2009; Faleye 2010) outlined the findings similar to the results of present study. In present study, despite the fact that students did not differ statistically in terms of test anxiety, female students were having higher test anxiety as compared to their male counterpart.

Result of the study further showed that highest number of test anxious students was from extended family although family type was not the significant variable in test anxiety. There is debate over which family is better in individual's growth but parents from nuclear family can invest more time in education of their children. Also, friction between parents and other members of extended family might have contributed in test anxiety of students.

The findings of study showed that more than half of the students had average academic achievement motivation. All students with low academic achievement motivation had high test anxiety but more students with high academic achievement motivation also had some level of test anxiety. This implies that academic achievement motivation is not contributing much in variability of test anxiety. The conclusion of Chauhan (2016) that achievement motivation is not related to academic anxiety also justifies this inference.

Result of the study also showed that students did not differ significantly in test anxiety with adjustment as a variable. However, all students with unsatisfactory to very unsatisfactory adjustment had some level of test anxiety and lowest proportion of students with excellent adjustment had the same. This indicates that poor adjustment is somewhat related to test anxiety. Study further showed that test anxiety was not significantly related to self-efficacy and emotional intelligence. Even if not significant, direction of relationship of test anxiety with these variables was analogous to previous studies (For example, Asayesh, Hosseini, Sharififard and Kharameh, 2016; Ebrahimi and Khoshsima, 2014) in that test anxiety was negatively related to self-efficacy and emotional intelligence.

This study, focused in exploring test anxiety prevalence and correlates, concludes that test anxiety is prevalent in a large portion of tenth grade students. Also, type of school is significant variable in test anxiety with private school students suffering more from test anxiety. Further girls and boys do not differ significantly in terms of test anxiety. Academic achievement motivation, adjustment, type of family, self-efficacy and emotional intelligence are not the significant variables in test anxiety difference. However, this study was limited in sample size and suggests broad scale study in the same topic.

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