

An Investigation of Test Anxiety by EFL University Students A Field Study

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Abstract:

The present study tackles EFL university students' test anxiety which refers to an irrational fear that leads to the avoidance of the feared situation or object. It first attends to the problem that many EFL university students experience different types of fears at different stages, namely before, during and after tests. It also hypothesizes that EFL University students, males and females, vary in their anxiety of tests, first in terms of the timing of such anxiety, and second in terms of the reasons behind their anxiety, whether personal, academic, or social. As such, the aims of the study are, in the main, to validate the afore-listed hypotheses, by means of a 52-item questionnaire designed by both researchers. The data for the study were collected from a sample of EFL university students during the 2nd term of the academic year 2011-2012. It has been found out that EFL university students both males and females suffer from similar levels of test anxiety in general. As for the timing of test anxiety, females have higher levels of anxiety than males during the two stages of before and during the test, while both of them show similar levels of anxiety in after the test stage of timing. Furthermore, the results also show that the academic and personal factors of test anxiety have affected female students but not the males, while the social factors have affected both of them by similar levels of test anxiety. Some recommendations and suggestions for future research are given on the basis of the findings.

أستقصاء القلق من الإختبار لدى طلبة الجامعة المتخصصين في اللغة الإنكليزية - دراسة ميدانية -

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ملخص البحث:

يتناول البحث القلق من الإختبار لدى طلبة الجامعة المتخصصين في اللغة الإنكليزية كلغة أجنبية، يشير القلق من الإختبار إلى الخوف غير المعقول والذي يؤدي بدوره إلى تجنب المواقف أو الأشياء المخيفة، وجرى أولاً التطرق إلى مشكلة البحث المتمثلة بشعور الكثير من الطلبة موضوع البحث بأنواع مختلفة من القلق وفي مراحل متباينة: قبل أو اثناء أو بعد الإختبار.

ويفترض البحث بأن الطلبة الجامعيين، ذكورا وإناثا، يتباينون في القلق من الإختبار؛ أولاً فيما يتعلق بتوقيت هكذا قلق، وثانياً بخصوص الأسباب الكامنة وراءه والتي قد تكون شخصية أو أكاديمية أو إجتماعية، وعليه يهدف البحث الحالي إلى إثبات صحة الفرضيات المشار إليها آنفاً من خلال إستبانة تضم (52) فقرة صممت من قبل كلا الباحثين، كما تم جمع البيانات من عينة من طلبة الجامعة خلال الفصل الدراسي الثاني العام الدراسي 2011-2012.

وقد لوحظ بأن طلبة الجامعة ذكورا وإناثا من المتخصصين في اللغة الإنكليزية كلغة أجنبية يعانون القلق من الإختبار بمستويات مماثلة بشكل عام. وفيما يخص توقيت القلق، تعاني الطالبات من مستويات أعلى من القلق مقارنة بالطلاب في مرحلتي ما قبل وأثناء الإختبار، في حين أظهر الطلبة الذكور والإناث مستويات متشابهة من القلق في مرحلة ما بعد الإختبار. وتظهر النتائج أيضاً تأثيراً أكبر العوامل الأكاديمية والشخصية على الطالبات مقارنة بالطلاب الذكور، بينما أثرت العوامل الإجتماعية بمستويات متشابهة تقريباً على الطلاب والطالبات. وعليه تم تقديم بعض التوصيات والمقترحات بإجراء دراسات مستقبلية إستناداً الى النتائج التي تم التوصل إليها.

A. The Theoretical Part:

I. Introduction:

Education is a domain where efforts are exerted for the sake of enhancing learners' manners of thinking and ways of behaviour in a positive direction, i.e. the extent to which the set objectives are brought about. The latter is usually measured through the conduction of tests that are

administered to change learners' thinking and behaviour in the desirable direction, and duly find out how much this objective has been brought about.

From ancient times till date, tests have formed part and parcel of any educational system. They have constituted the most paramount means to assess learners' abilities, to the extent that educational system is said to be an empty vase in case tests are absent. According to Ahmad (2007), a test is "a set of questions, problems or exercises to which the students are asked to respond to obtain an appraisal of designated characteristics of the students such as specific kind of knowledge, aptitude, abilities and skills".

Yet, doing a test is not an easy task that usually goes on with much smoothness and ease. Students who undergo tests, generally and sometimes for unjustifiable reasons, experience a state that is usually labeled as test anxiety.

Sibnath et al. (2010: 18-31), quoting a number of researchers in the field, have come to the conclusion that anxiety is one of the most common psychological disorders in educational settings worldwide. Its prevalence rates range from 4.0% to 25.0%, with an average rate of 8.0%, and these figures may be underestimated since anxiety can go on undetected by a noticeable number of students due to the internalized nature of its symptoms. To be more specific, students usually have a strong fear of one or more test performance situations as they assume that their low performance will be humiliating or embarrassing and that others will judge them negatively. As such, "they experience extreme discomfort and anxiety during (test) situations, and seek avoidance whenever possible" (Loranger, 1988), and "they try to run away from books (as) they suffer from (test) fever which makes failing (quite) contemptuous" (Nigel, 1997).

Finally, tests, whether oral or written, create nervousness on the part of students who often feel it is a significant problem when their studies require participation in group discussions or presentation or when they fear writing as they are concerned that their hands will shake as they write and performance will be evaluated negatively (Zeidner, 1998).

As for the problem to be investigated, some very known factors, represented in the main by the amount of studying or the time spent on doing academic tasks, are usually specified to be the main reasons behind students' low achievement or the experience of severe states of unease, fear, and discomfort, especially when tests are nearing and preparation for them are on the stake. Test anxiety, first in terms of its timing: before, during and after testing, and second in terms of the factors, namely personal, academic, or social that contribute to students' unease and discomfort, is rarely identified, especially within the Iraqi context, as the main reason behind students' experiences of fear and duly underachievement in tests.

The major aims of the present study are as follows:

- Shedding light on EFL university students' test anxiety as it is intended to tackle the topic theoretically in terms of the subtopics of much relevance to it.
- Attending to the real factors, namely personal, academic, and social that contribute to EFL university students' test anxiety.
- Finding out the intensity of EFL university students test anxiety in terms of its timing, i.e. before (preparation for), during (performance on) or after (reflection on) tests.
- Comparing between male and female EFL university students as far as the timing of test anxiety, and the factors that contribute to their English test anxiety are concerned.

The present research attempts to verify the following null hypotheses:

1. Iraqi EFL university students show no variation as far as their test anxiety is concerned.
2. There are no differences between male and female Iraqi EFL university students in terms of the timing, i.e. before, during, or after testing, of their test anxiety
3. There are no differences between male and female Iraqi EFL university students in terms of the factors that contribute to their test anxiety.

The present research is expected to be highly significant as the findings are expected, in the first place, to help to find out the intensity level of test anxiety among EFL university students. The findings are also expected to help both teachers and parents to cope with the problem of test anxiety and find the suitable solutions for it. Moreover, educational authorities are expected to make benefit from the findings in their attempts to decrease test anxiety among students as the investigation of anxiety-creating factors will hopefully broaden the insight into the issue of test anxiety and help in making tests environments less stressful. Finally, the present research is expected to be of considerable interest to language educators and students with respect to its implications for foreign language pedagogy, particularly in the contexts where students come from a wide range of linguistic, cultural and ethnic backgrounds.

II. Anxiety: Definition and Major Types:

The widely known term phobia, which is also labeled as anxiety or apprehension, refers to the fear disorder which leads to avoidance and panic. According to Khalid and Hasan (2009), the term is derived from the Greek word "Phobus", which means 'fear', 'terror' and 'panic'. But a phobia is more than this since all persons experience fear of terror occasionally. It is an irrational, intense, persistent fear and anxiety of certain situations, objects and activities.

Since different labels, namely test phobia, test anxiety, test apprehension, etc. are quite common in the related literature, the term “test anxiety” will be used throughout the present research so as to avoid overlapping between and interchangeability of the use of the relevant terms.

Psychologically speaking, anxiety is a construct that is commonly described by psychologists as a state of a vague fear that is only indirectly associated with an object (Scovel, 1991: 18). It is, as Spielberger (1983: 1) points out, the subjective feeling of tension, nervousness, and worry associated with an arousal of the autonomic nervous system. Its common physical symptoms include rapid palpitation, nausea, sweating, trembling, while the internal indications include distress, delusion or obsessional thought. Anxiety is also viewed as an uncomfortable emotional state in which one perceives danger, feels powerless and experiences tension in preparation for an unexpected danger. Finally, Javed and Khan (2011: 4) state that suffering from anxiety disorder can interfere with many aspects of life. Its impact on life depends on how easy it is to avoid the horror object, place or situation since it can easily disrupt daily routines, work efficiency, diminish self-esteem and twist relationships.

Anxiety is generally classified into three types, namely trait, state and situation specific. According to Ellis (1994: 479-480), trait anxiety, a more permanent disposition to be anxious, is viewed as an aspect of personality. State anxiety is a transient anxiety; a response to a particular anxiety-provoking stimulus such as an important test (Spielberger, 1983: cited in Horwitz, 2001: 113). It is experienced at a particular moment in time as a response to definite situation. Lastly, situation-specific anxiety is related to anxiety aroused at specific situations and events.

In the field of foreign language teaching and learning, Brown (2000: 151) states that for the sake of breaking down the construct “anxiety” into researchable issues, three types of foreign language anxiety have been identified, namely communication apprehension, which arises from students’ inability to express thoughts and ideas in an adequate manner, fear of negative social evaluation which stems from the attempt to make a positive social impression on others, and test anxiety over academic evaluation.

III. Test Anxiety: Definition and Components:

Although tests are inevitable and no educational system can exist without tests, it is an admitted fact that a noticeable number of students get anxious of tests.

Test anxiety, as explained by Horwitz et al. (1986), refers to “a type of performance anxiety stemming from a fear of failure”. It is quite prominent in test situations because of its consistent performance evaluative nature (Tanveer, 2007: 12). On his part, Davies (1986) maintains that test anxiety is a major problem for a considerable number of students in different studying

levels since they view tests as something that is almost inevitable. Furthermore, its close impact on or relevance to academic performance has made it quite significant. Khatoon and Parveen (n. d.: 133) add that test anxiety is a self damaging factor which negatively affects students and their performance, as they become unable to give their maximum productivity and the end result would be critical.

With regard to its components, since the early 1970s test anxiety was viewed to be composed of two main dimensions, namely emotionality and worry. Liebert and Morris (1967: 976) define emotionality as the “physiological reactions of the autonomic nervous system to stress”. It is typically evident through physiological responses or manifestations experienced during evaluative situations, such as (a) increased galvanic skin response and heart rate, (b) dizziness, (c) nausea, or (d) feelings of panic (See also Deffenbacher, 1980; Morris et al., 1981; Hembree, 1988). The same authors operationally define worry as “cognitive concerns about the consequences of failure”(p.976). It is evident through cognitive manifestations experienced after the student perceives heightened levels of physiological arousal. It consists of individuals’ cognitive reactions to evaluative situations in the times prior to, during, and after evaluative tasks.

A different viewpoint considers test anxiety as composed of distinct cognitive, affective-physiological and behavioural components. Zeidner & Mathews (2005) state that the cognitive component refers to worrisome thoughts and concerns about the consequences of failure. It is, as Hembree (1988) assumes, the factor most consistently found to be associated with declines in performance. The affective-physiological component refers to the physical sensations that accompany anxiety (trembling, headaches, etc.). Finally, the behavioural component refers to actions indicating a lack of task focus during a test such as playing with a pencil, looking around the room and so forth (Also see Connors et al., 2009: 3).

The operational definition of test anxiety used in this research is: “The feeling of unrest and worry that third year male and female students, Dept. of English, College of Basic Education, experience before, during, and after having tests at the department in question”.

IV. Phases of Test Anxiety:

Moore (2006: 4) specifies three phases of test Anxiety, in each of which anxiety is differently expressed. During the Test Preparation Phase (i.e. before the test), high levels of test anxiety are experienced by those students in terms of processing the information presented to them during prior lectures (Ikeda et al., 1996). In other words, such students face much difficulty in learning and retaining material that they will be tested on in the future, at a time they do not always realize that they are unprepared (Everson et al., 1991). They also study as much as or more than their low anxiety peers, but

the methods of study reported by the high anxiety group are highly repetitive and less effective (Culler & Holohan, 1980). They further view the forthcoming test as a stressful event due to the personal harm (on grades, self-esteem, or status) that the test can cause (Schwarzer & Jerusalem, 1992).

Test anxiety experienced by students during the Test Performance Phase (i.e. during the test) varies on the basis of their study and coping skills (Onwuegbuzie & Daley, 1996). For instance, students with poor study skills usually face reduced performance regardless of the type of test, lack of time limit, or reduced item difficulty (Moore, 2006: 25). While students with adequate preparation skills are hypothesized to encounter retrieval failures only in the presence of debilitating contextual anxiety (Naveh-Benjamin et al., 1987). On the contrary, students with high test anxiety often claim that they knew the material before the test, but on stepping into the test hall, their minds went blank (Cassady & Johnson, 2002).

Finally, students' test anxiety may be imminent after the test; a phase usually referred to as Test Reflection (after the test) phase. The level of anxiety experienced here is determined by students' self-efficacy about testing. Bandalos et al., (1995) maintain that if the student frequently fails and does not attribute the failure to his or her own actions, s/he will experience higher anxiety levels. This is on the one hand. On the other hand, students who recognize that the effort they put into a task is reflected by their grades often report lower levels of anxiety (Moore, 2006: 26).

V. Related Literature:

The related literature on EFL students test anxiety highlights a main point of departure, viz. students' anxiety is due to their perceptions of the tests in terms of validity, time limit, techniques, format, length, environment and clarity of instructions (Young, 1999).

With regard to test validity, Young (1991) found that students experience anxiety when the content of the tests did not reflect or was not relevant to what they were taught. A similar finding is reported by Horwitz and Young (1991) who noted that the absence of the face validity of tests was a main source of students' anxiety. The same view is shared by Madsen (1982) who found out that less valid tests led to high anxiety on the part of the students.

Time limit constituted another focal point of study by researchers as it is said to increase EFL students' test anxiety. Ohata (2005) noted that students' feeling of time pressure as they had to organize their ideas within a short period of time, while doing tests, increased their test anxiety.

Test formatting, i.e. the appropriate techniques of presenting the items of a test, was also investigated in terms of its provocation of students' test anxiety. For instance, Young (1991) reports that unfamiliar question types

made students feel anxious especially after spending hours anxious when they were preparing for the tests.

Students' capacity to manage tests and fear of getting low marks had also been attended to by the researchers investigating EFL students' test anxiety. Chastain (1975) found out a negative correlation which indicated that low test anxiety was related to greater success. Likewise, Ohata's study (2005) indicated anxiety by most students; first for taking tests, and second because test-taking situations made them fear the negative consequences of getting a low mark.

Finally, students' gender has also been a focal point of investigation by researchers interested in arriving at conclusions concerning the correlation between test anxiety and students' gender. In this respect, a number of research findings are cited by Moore (2006: 30) who states that Chang (1997) found out that males typically score lower on measurements of test anxiety than females. A second study by Stober (2004) revealed that the different test anxiety constructs affected males and females in different ways: (a) In females, worry was related to task-orientation and preparation and low avoidance coping, (b) emotionality was related to seeking social support in male students and to task-orientation and preparation in female students; and (c) interference was related to avoidance coping in females. Everson et al. (1991) reported a gender effect on worry and emotionality test anxiety for high achieving students. Female students reported more test anxiety than males and experienced higher worry than emotionality, while male students reported little difference between the two dimensions.

A final explanation for the differences in the levels of test anxiety on the part of male and female students is based on the perceptions of threat in evaluative situations. Arch (1987), for instance, reported that gender differences in self-reported efficacy, esteem, discomfort, and task avoidance were a function of the level of performance evaluation. When performance evaluation was salient, females were more likely to rate themselves as less capable and confident in their abilities, more uncomfortable with the experimental setting, and less willing to perform the task again. However, when the experimental condition did not have a salient evaluative component, females had more positive feelings on all perceptions of the event and their abilities.

VI. Factors Contributing to Test Anxiety:

A plethora of affecting factors is said to contribute to students' test anxiety. To make the theoretical part of the present research reflect its practical part, i.e. the questionnaire, the factors in question have been categorized into personal, academic and social.

On a personal level, most students fear that tests may decrease their efficiency and good performance on the basis of their knowledge and abilities.

Their occasional focus on tests entails a feeling of fear rather than enjoying their classes (Khatoon and Parveen, n. d.: 133). This is concomitant with the case of laborious and diligent students who are under normal stress, just contray to the weak students who are under heavy stress and anxiety (Javed and Khan. 2011: 5).

Test anxiety is also said to be personally developed in cases when students believe that marks are an estimation of their personal worth, placing too much emphasis on a single test, give in to guilt feelings or anxiety as a result of inadequate preparation for tests, and feel helpless, believing that they have no control over their performance or grades. In other words, students may undergo test anxiety as they cannot predict the outcome of a test. They may feel temporarily helpless in a testing situation when they know they have not studied enough. Feeling guilty for not exerting the required efforts may cause most students to experience test anxiety. In addition, test anxiety may stem from a number of sources; most commonly lack of test preparation, namely cramming the night before the exam, poor study habits, poor time management, lack of organization of the text, notes, and homework.

Academically speaking, the main objective behind teaching is to help students in terms of enabling them to think, feel or act in new or different ways, and to instruct them how to do so. Yet, many teachers' use of old fashioned teaching methods which are assumed to be sterile and quite uselss causes test anxiety among students. In this case, most intelligent, industrious and hardworking students would have fear, anger and frustration against those less knowledgeable teachers and in such a way that would negatively affect their performance (Chennai & Ram, 2002).

With regard to the social factors, parents form a major source of students' test anxiety. In this respect, reference is made to those parents who are feeling too high of their boys or girls and of their achievement, and who may react quite negatively when their expectations do not come true. If this is coupled with familial studying environments that are too tense during test periods, many students would lose interest and live in a state of fear that would duly lead to nervousness, anxiety, lack of appetite, empty stomach and poor performance in the tests (Gupta, 2009; Javed and Khan. 2011: 5).

Parents' rigid and intolerant behaviour while their children, i.e. students, are preparing for their tests may be a major reason of stress and anxiety. Such a behaviour is also said to make students become exasperated in reaction (Fouzia & Samina, 2009). Students' growing fear of not doing well on a test, so as to live up to their parents' expectations, or losing the affection of people they are caring about if they do not succeed, may haunt them and arouse the feelings of nervousness and anxiety (Emmelkamp et al., 1995).

VII. Strategies to Cope with Test Anxiety:

Due to its detrimental effects on students, both psychologically and academically, there have been attempts to pinpoint the main reasons behind test anxiety. Such attempts have also been geared towards the finding of the most effective remedies for the causes in question. In the present section, reference will be made to the steps which, in case of being implemented, will reduce students' test anxiety. It is worthy to note that the strategies followed in this respect will be categorized first in terms of the timing of test anxiety, i.e. before, during and after tests, and second in terms of the party, namely the student, the teacher, students' parents, etc., who allays students' such anxiety.

- Before Testing:

Students' adoption of certain strategies before testing can reduce anxiety. To this concern, students' good preparation, time spacing and review, taking regular short breaks after about 60 minutes of studies to maximize and sustain the level of memorization and concentration, and maintaining a positive attitude can reduce test anxiety. Added to that, the World Psychiatric Association (1995) advises students to skim the material to get an overall preview for clear picture, formulate questions which highlight the aims derived from reading, note the key ideas appropriately, identify the main points using lists, key words and diagrams, etc., and test by reciting and reviewing the summaries immediately after learning the material and again at later intervals. Smita (2009) points out that the best strategy is to start preparations early keeping in mind a general idea of the course and the major points of the materials before starting tests.

Also, teachers informing of the students on the aims of the tests, content, test techniques, number of the questions before the administration and giving valid tests and enough time to answer are further strategies to reduce test anxiety. Shashank (2008) suggests that the teacher should make the students realize that tests are merely part of the learning process to explore their skills, appreciate students on their even slightest improvement in performances which will enhance self esteem and amount of hardworking, and help the students find out their own areas of deficiencies. Ndirangu et al. (2009: 1-7) put forward some useful strategies that can help students to reduce test anxiety. Examples of such strategies are: helping students with effective techniques in preparing for tests, provision of guide books, conducting class sessions on how to take a test, counselling before tests, and application of relaxation techniques before tests. The same authors recommend that providing students with tools and strategies that build both emotional skills and healthy physical habits when preparing for a test can help them overcome test anxiety and the associated symptoms, while improving their ability to prepare for and perform on critical testing.

Parents' support can reduce their boys or girls' stress and test anxiety to some extent. Botella et al. (1998) suggest that parents should be affectionate, encourage to complete homework each day, motivate the students to want to take a test by reinforcing their efforts to include the studying and homework tasks rather than focus on making a certain grade, reduce anxiety by enthusiasm, praise and, at times, small rewards to give their best effort in spite of feeling worried, teach students to challenge these ideas by looking at the evidence against, and help students to find a more optimistic thought to use whenever the negative ones arise. Finally, Evans et al. (1995) maintain that parents should avoid using excessive reassurance, since too much of it causes anxious students to seek to discredit the parents' opinion, telling students exactly what to do. It is more useful to ask them to come up with a realistic plan for studying and taking the test since the successful completion of the plan enhances students' feeling of control and accomplishment which will decrease anxiety.

- During Testing:

Students staying relaxed, reading the directions slowly and carefully, asking the teacher to explain vague directions, skimming through the test so as to know how to pace one's self, writing down important formulas, facts, definitions and/or keywords in the margin first in order not to forget them, doing the simple questions first to build up confidence for the harder questions, not worrying about how fast other people finish their test, skipping a difficult question and coming back to it later, and focussing on the question at hand and not letting one's mind wander on other things, are all strategies that students can be used to reduce their anxiety during testing (Aydin et al., 2006: 156).

- After Testing:

It should be noted that even after the test is over, the anxiety still haunts the student who informs his colleagues about the confusion during tests by saying that s/he could not manage answering some of the questions to the level required, counts his/her marks daily and thinks that s/he would get a second class at least, remains in such type of suspense till the result announcement day arrives, and tries to find his/her roll number on the list with trembling hands (Stellar, 2009). As such, there should be a close look into such feelings, which if remained unattended to, will affect students' forthcoming performance on other tests on the timetable.

In a nutshell, Syncamore and Corey (1990) suggest a few instructions to improve the system which can reduce test anxiety among students. For instance, tests would be switched over to semesters instead of annual to relieve pressure. Moreover, internal and external evaluation should be made comprising written and oral tests. Also, a combination of multiple choice

questions, short and essay type questions with conceptual and analytical reasoning should be included to test comprehension level and broaden skills not based on memorization.

B. The Experimental Design:

VIII. Procedure and Data Collection:

The major purpose of the study was to investigate the problem of test anxiety among EFL university students. The population of the study included both male and female students at the Dept. of English, College of Basic Education, University of Mosul. The sample of the study was selected randomly from the population already referred to. It included (60) 3rd year students during the second term of the academic year 2011-2012.

IX. Data Instruments

1- The Questionnaire:

The researchers considered preparing a questionnaire which required students to give their correct and frank answers to its items. This questionnaire consists of (52) items classified according to timing, which includes three stages, namely (before the test, during the test, and after the test), and the factors contributing to students' anxiety, namely (academic, personal, and social factors). See the appendix.

2- Reliability:

Reliability refers to a method repeatedly and consistently measuring whatever it is supposed to measure (Rasinger, 2008: 28). In order to ensure that the scale of the questionnaire used in this research works reliably, the researchers relied on the test- re-test method testing the same sample twice at two different points in time. The correlation factor was calculated and it was (0.84) which means that the scale was reliable.

3- Validity:

Validity means "...the issue of whether our method actually measures what it is supposed to measure, allowing us to draw appropriate conclusions" (ibid: 30). To ensure whether the scale adopted is valid or not, it was presented to a number of juries to prove its face validity. Juries were agreed on the scale by a percentage of (80%). No items were deleted, but some modifications were made.

4- The Pilot Study:

Piloting the questionnaire means running a test with only a few participants in order to detect flaws, to identify accuracy of measures used, and to give some indication about reliability and validity (ibid: 68). Following

Fowler (2002) who suggests a pilot sample of (20-50), twenty students, from the population of the research mentioned above, were recruited for this purpose. The scale was applied on Sunday (1/ 4/ 2012).

X. Data Analysis:

This section is devoted for analyzing the data resulted out of applying the test anxiety scale on the sample of the research. The statistical tools used for this purpose are: the calculated mean, the standard deviation and T-test.

As far as the first hypothesis is concerned which reads “EFL university students show no variation as far as their test anxiety is concerned”, there are no significant differences between the calculated mean of male students and those of female students according to their test anxiety. The calculated mean of the males is (152.93) and the standard deviation is (29.72), while those of the females are: (169.86) and (25.88), respectively. Moreover, the calculated T is (2.35) whereas the tabulated T is (2.000) at a significant level of (0.05) and a free degree of (58). This indicates that both male and female students have similar levels of test anxiety. These results are clarified in table (1) below.

Table (1): T value for the difference between male and female students according to test anxiety.

| Group | Sample | Degree of Freedom | Calculated Mean | Standard Deviation | Calculated T | Tabulated T | Sig. Level |
|---------|--------|-------------------|-----------------|--------------------|--------------|-------------|------------|
| Females | 30 | 58 | 169.86 | 25.88 | 2.35 | 2.000 | 0.05 |
| Males | 30 | | 152.93 | 29.72 | | | |

Turning to the second hypothesis the content of which is “There are no differences between male and female EFL university students in terms of the timing, i.e. before, during, or after testing, of their test anxiety”, the results show significant differences of test anxiety level between male and female students. This difference clearly appears during the two stages of (before and during the test) and in favour of the female students in both stages. Before the test, females' calculated mean is (76.63) and the standard deviation is (11.94) and those of the male students are: (67.40) and (14.50), respectively which results into a calculated T of (2.69) and a tabulated T of (2.000) at a

significant level of (0.05) and (58) degrees of freedom. As for (during the test) stage, females' calculated mean is (43.60) and the standard deviation is (8.43) and those of male students are: (38.63) and (7.48), respectively. This results into a calculated T of (2.41) and a tabulated T of (2.000) at a significant level of (0.05) and (58) degrees of freedom. These results mean that female students fear exams more than male students in both the aforementioned stages. Regarding the stage of (after the test), the means show no significant differences between male and female students. This entails that both male and female students have no fears during this stage. These results are presented in table (2).

Table (2): T value for the difference between male and female students in relation to test timing.

| Group | Timing | Sample | Degree of Freedom | Calculated Mean | Standard Deviation | Calculated T | Tabulated T | Sig. |
|---------|-----------------|--------|-------------------|-----------------|--------------------|--------------|-------------|------|
| Females | Before the Test | 30 | 58 | 76.63 | 11.94 | 2.69 | 2.000 | 0.05 |
| Males | | 30 | | 67.40 | 14.50 | | | |
| Females | During the Test | 30 | 58 | 43.60 | 8.43 | 2.41 | 2.000 | |
| Males | | 30 | | 38.63 | 7.48 | | | |
| Females | After the Test | 30 | 58 | 49.23 | 8.64 | 1.96 | 2.000 | |
| Males | | 30 | | 46.30 | 10.72 | | | |

The third hypothesis of this research is: "There are no differences between male and female EFL university students in terms of the factors that contribute to their test anxiety". By analyzing the data related to this hypothesis, the results represent a significant difference in both the academic and personal factors and in favour of the female students. In relation to the academic factors, the calculated mean of the females is (50.000) and the standard deviation is (7.21), while those of the male students are: (45.000) and (8.58), respectively. As for the personal factors, the calculated mean of the females is (108.36) and the standard deviation is (18.94) and those of the males are: (97.23) and (21.39), respectively. This is on the one hand. On the other hand, social factors show no significant differences as far as the calculated means and the standard deviation of both male and female students are concerned. The calculated mean of female students is (11.533) and the standard deviation is (3.65), while those of the males are: (10.166) and (2.98), respectively. See table (3):

Table (3): T value for the difference between male and female students in relation to test anxiety factors.

| Group | Factors | Sample | Degree of Freedom | Calculated Mean | Standard Deviation | Calculated T | Tabulated T | Sig. |
|---------|----------|--------|-------------------|-----------------|--------------------|--------------|-------------|------|
| Females | Academic | 30 | 58 | 50.000 | 7.21 | 2.117 | 2.000 | 0.05 |
| Males | | 30 | | 45.000 | 8.58 | | | |
| Females | Personal | 30 | 58 | 108.36 | 18.94 | 2.134 | 2.000 | |
| Males | | 30 | | 97.23 | 21.39 | | | |
| Females | Social | 30 | 58 | 11.533 | 3.65 | 1.58 | 2.000 | |
| Males | | 30 | | 10.166 | 2.98 | | | |

XI. Discussion and Conclusions:

In the present research, the following results were found: First, Iraqi university students of EFL, both males and females, have similar levels of test anxiety. Some previous studies arrived at significant correlations between students' gender and test anxiety, such as Chang (1997), and Stobber (2004). In the present research, however, no such correlations are there. The first hypothesis which states that students show no variation in relation to their test anxiety is validated. This indicates that test anxiety constructs affected both male and female students in similar ways and levels.

Second, the differences in the levels of test anxiety on the part of male and female students is highly correlated with timing of their test anxiety. As far as the two stages of (before and during the test), female students feel more worried during these stages than male students do although they prepare well more than male students. This result might be due to the emotional aspects of females' nature. Most females treat themselves as being less confident in their capacities than males, and they fear the experimental and evaluative settings more than males do (Arch, 1987).

Turning to the third stage of test anxiety timing, namely (after the test), the results clarify the important fact of having no fear at all, during this phase, on the part of both males and females. Although Stellar (2009) notes that students are still haunted by some kind of anxiety even after the test is over, the present research proves the opposite. In spite of the fact that students reported that they discuss with their colleagues the fears they were having

during tests, still such discussions have no effect on showing feels of worry or suspense after they finished their tests.

Third, test anxiety factors, namely academic, personal, and social affected males and females in different ways: (a) female students show higher levels of anxiety than male students in relation to both the academic and personal factors. On the academic level, females desire to and focus on their identities and capacities through academic achievement has negative effect on their test anxiety levels. On the personal level, females feel that their personal worth is estimated by the marks they get. Placing too much emphasis on the personal factors results in some negative feelings because they were afraid of some personal factors like: running out of time, not answering well and having low marks, being accused of attempting to cheat...etc. Such emphasis is irritable and hard to get rid off by females causing anxiety levels to increase more and more. (b) both male and female students show similar levels of test anxiety in relation to the social factors. Their level of test anxiety may increase because of their equal growing fear of their parents' rigid and intolerable behaviour if they did not do well on a test, or perform poorly, or feel shy if their colleagues make fun of them because of their low achievement.

XII. Recommendations:

Based on the findings of this study, the following recommendations are put forward:

- 1) ESL/EFL, teachers should acknowledge the existence of test anxiety on the part of students, and should take initiatives for its effective reduction. They should identify individuals with signs of stress and anxiety and should apply appropriate strategies to help them counteract these feelings.
- 2) Teachers should initiate discussions in the class about the feelings of anxiety and should take measures to reduce the sense of competition among them.
- 3) There should be some specific teachers training courses on managing test anxiety in order to make teachers aware of this complex issue and, hence, alleviate it.
- 4) Students should seek counseling before doing tests so as to increase their confidence.
- 5) Building on 2 above, group counseling sessions may be more beneficial. Such sessions enable students to share their personal experiences and cope strategies with others so that they know that they are not alone

XIII. Suggestions for Future Rresearch

Future researches can be conducted in terms of:

1. Further exploration from a variety of perspectives and approaches such as investigating test anxiety components that affect students' achievement.

2- More analytic concerns such as the teachers' attitudes as a factor that contributes to students' test anxiety.

3- Looking at the effectiveness of intervention programs for students with test anxiety, namely counseling sessions to students suffering from severe anxiety to control the problem before it leads to more severe problems such as low academic self-concept or even depression.

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APPENDIX Questionnaire

Dear Student:

We are investigating students' test Anxiety. Would you please give your frank and correct answers to the items of the following questionnaire by ticking () in the square of the option, opposite to each item, which best applies to you. Many thanks for your cooperation.

| | | |
|---------------|--------|--|
| Gender | Male | |
| | Female | |

| | I feel anxious because... | Applies to me to | | | | |
|-----------|--|------------------------------|----------------------|-------------------------|--------------------|----------------------------|
| | | A Very Large Extent | A Large Extent | A Moderate Extent | A Low Extent | A Very Low Extent |
| A. | Before the Test: | | | | | |
| 1 | The questions might be very difficult. | | | | | |
| 2 | There might be unseen questions. | | | | | |
| 3 | The questions might be in a form I am not familiar with and hence I will not know how to answer. | | | | | |
| 4 | I might not answer well and get a good mark. | | | | | |
| 5 | The questions will require long answers and I will not have enough time. | | | | | |
| 6 | I might feel sick on the day of the exam. | | | | | |
| 7 | I might not be in time for the exam. | | | | | |
| 8 | I might have a familial problem. | | | | | |
| 9 | I might be accused of attempting to cheat. | | | | | |
| 10 | I might not have enough time to study. | | | | | |
| 11 | The material to be covered for the exam is too long. | | | | | |
| 12 | I feel afraid of the teacher especially when it is the first exam in the subject s/he teaches. | | | | | |
| 13 | I might not be ready for the exam. | | | | | |
| 14 | I have not been studying daily. | | | | | |
| 15 | There might be no questions to be left out. | | | | | |
| 16 | Students' discussions of certain questions and their reactions before the exam scatter the information I have. | | | | | |
| 17 | I have not summarized the material for the exam. | | | | | |
| | I feel anxious because... | Applies to me to | | | | |
| | | A Very Large Extent | A Large Extent | A Moderate Extent | A Low Extent | A Very Low Extent |

| | | | | | | |
|-----------|---|--|-------------------------------|----------------------------------|-----------------------------|--------------------------------------|
| 18 | The teacher might not understand my answers. | | | | | |
| 19 | I have read the important materials only | | | | | |
| 20 | There is no chance to postpone the exam especially when it is the last chance to success. | | | | | |
| 21 | I might know there is an exam shortly before it. | | | | | |
| 22 | I might feel hesitant to answer the questions. | | | | | |
| 23 | I might not have enough time to review the material. | | | | | |
| B. | During the Test: | | | | | |
| 24 | I do not know all the answers. | | | | | |
| 25 | I think I will definitely fail. | | | | | |
| 26 | I feel I am totally lost. | | | | | |
| 27 | I cannot remember the answers. | | | | | |
| 28 | I might be busy-minded with issues other than the exam. | | | | | |
| 29 | I might feel hesitant in answering. | | | | | |
| 30 | I might feel uncomfortable and for unknown reasons. | | | | | |
| 31 | The wording of the question might make me not understand some vocabulary items. | | | | | |
| 32 | I might not have enough time to answer. | | | | | |
| 33 | I feel unstable and review my answer too many times. | | | | | |
| 34 | The questions are difficult. | | | | | |
| 35 | I become under heavy stress due to the tension I am undergoing. | | | | | |
| 36 | There is tough invigilation. | | | | | |
| C. | After the Tesrt: | | | | | |
| 37 | I expect failure. | | | | | |
| 38 | Scoring might be tough. | | | | | |
| 39 | There might be a mistake in scoring my paper. | | | | | |
| 40 | The instructor might not be fair in correcting papers. | | | | | |
| 41 | I might have forgotten to put down my name on the test paper. | | | | | |
| 42 | I might get an unexpected mark. | | | | | |
| | I feel anxious because... | Applies to me to | | | | |
| | | A Very Large Extent | A Large Extent | A Moderate Extent | A Low Extent | A Very Low Extent |
| 43 | My parents might be angry because of my | | | | | |

| | | | | | | |
|----|--|--|--|--|--|--|
| | low performance. | | | | | |
| 44 | The instructor might be annoyed because of my poor performance. | | | | | |
| 45 | My colleagues might make fun of me. | | | | | |
| 46 | My mark will be lower than those of my close friends. | | | | | |
| 47 | There was a question to be left out and I am not sure if I have done that. | | | | | |
| 48 | I feel hesitant to discuss the questions with my colleagues. | | | | | |
| 49 | I feel I have to sit for the exam by the end of summer vacation. | | | | | |
| 50 | I discovered that what I expected to be right answers turned to be wrong. | | | | | |
| 51 | I might have annoyed the instructor with my bad handwriting. | | | | | |
| 52 | I do not know if I have given the required answers | | | | | |