

# Test Anxiety In Foreign Language Assessment: A Query To Pender

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**Abstract**—Foreign language learning is a journey of hardships and challenges, students during their years of study face many problems that affect their future life and career. Test anxiety, as a psychological state, plays a pivotal role in educational psychology among academic research including the variety of influences it engenders on learners' performances. Thus, the present paper proposes theoretical and practical frameworks to understand the relationship existing between learners' anxiety levels and their test scores.

**Keywords**— *Test Anxiety, Educational Psychology, Test scores, language Assessment.*

## I. INTRODUCTION (*Heading 1*)

Testing has become an integral part in language education as it is needed for a variety of purposes. Its importance should be reflected upon the amount of the required literature devoted to this high-flying aspect of education. It has become an area of amplified interest among teachers and applied linguists at large for the last several years. Standardized tests, on the one hand, have assumed a prominent role in recent attempts by the government to improve the quality of education at the national scale. Herman (1991:2) states that '*testing advocates and many policymakers still view testing as a significant, positive, and cost effective tool in educational improvement*'. Therefore, over the last 30 years, it has been found that state testing affects largely teachers and students alike.

## II. LITERATURE REVIEW

### A. *Anxiety as a Barrier in Testing*

Given the diversity of factors affecting learners' psychology Oxford (1996:98) assumes that "*The affective dimension of learning is probably the most significant variables which may influence the language learning success or failure*". Thus, these affective variables play a crucial role in the process of language attainment, positive emotions and attitudes may turn the teaching more enjoyable and effective conversely, negative emotions can inhibit the learning process and its development.

Notwithstanding the proliferation of literature in the field of educational psychology, little seem to be done so far in the way anxiety affects language learning and testing. According to Aida (1994:165), research on foreign language anxiety still is underdeveloped and:

*...studies examining the relationship between anxiety and learner characteristics will help us increase our understanding of language learning from the learner's perspective and provide a wider range of insights.*

Herein, the application of psychology in language teaching had been the interest of many researchers all around the world. In view of this, a great number of researchers (Bailey, 1966; Horwitz, 2005; Scarason, 1996) seem to be aware of the urgent need to search about the impact of these psychological variables on the learning process. Among these psychological factors are the affective factors with "*anxiety*" as one of their sub-categories. Anxiety was found to be a stunt in language performance in some studies, anxiety was shown to be facilitative to language learning.

### B. Anxiety Defined

Language Anxiety has been a matter of considerable interest in language education setting for educators since it is a major obstacle to foreign language learning that the learners need to overcome (Cheng, 2008).

Research has exposed that anxiety is not infrequent in almost all disciplines of learning. Recently, Cassady (2010:1) brings up the term 'academic anxiety' as "a unifying formulation for the collection of anxieties learners experience while in schools". While it gives the impression that anxiety shares the same nature and consequences, different types of anxieties can be triggered under different circumstances. Clement (1980:25) views foreign language anxiety as "a complex construct that deals with learners' psychology in terms of their feelings self-esteem and self confidence". On their part, MacIntyre and Gardner (1994) describe anxiety as "the feeling of tension and apprehension specifically associated with second language contexts, including speaking, listening, and learning".

Testing as a word calls into mind the feeling of constant worry, discomfort and uneasiness, in this vein Sarson & Sarson, 1990, cited in Burns (2011:213) states that, "One of the most common anxiety types considered to be present among students, as one of the most pervasive reactions that individuals have to stress, is test anxiety". In a more down to earth terms, it has been defined by Zeidnen (1998:17) as a "set of phenomenological, psychological, and behavioral responses that accompany concern about possible negative consequences or failure of an exam or similar evaluation situations".

Therefore, almost everyone may experience a feeling of uneasiness and frustration when a test approaches. In fact, it is rare to find a student who does not approach the test with a degree of test anxiety. This kind of nervousness fear and discomfort happens *before, during* and sometimes *after* an exam. While it is perfectly natural to feel so, too much anxiety levels may become discouraging.

### III. METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this research work is to investigate the relationships between test anxiety and learners final achievement. The result may be helpful to teachers, educators and educationalists in general, in trying to understand the effect of test anxiety on learners' achievement. The study is based on the following research questions:

- What relationships may exist between learners' level of anxiety and their test scores?
- How may pulse rate control students anxiety levels?

### Correlations

		Anxiety Score	Test Score
Anxiety Score	Pearson Correlation	1	-,415 <sup>*</sup>
	Sig. (2-tailed)		,023
	N	30	30
Test Score	Pearson Correlation	-,415 <sup>*</sup>	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	,023	
	N	30	30

\*. Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

\* correlation coefficient r=-.415

**Table 1. Pearson Correlation Coefficient**

- How may learners test scores be in command of their pulse

rates?

Three hypotheses are assumed answering the previously asked questions:

- ✓ H1. Anxiety level may tremendously affect learners' test scores.
- ✓ H2. Elevated heartbeats may lead to a high level of anxiety.
- ✓ H3. Learners with elevated heartbeats may have low scores and vice versa.

### A. Participants

To get generalizable results, the sample chosen must be representative to the whole population (Dornyei, 2003). The study has been conducted with second-year EFL learners from Tlemcen University; English department. Thirty of them were randomly chosen. Besides, five teachers were also selected to check the matter from both sides. The study was concerned with second-year LMD students from Tlemcen University. Students of this group, males and females, were in the age group of 18 to 22 years old. They were all subject to a high-stakes examination. The sample chosen had neither hereditary anxiety nor cardiovascular problems. As for the informants, they are five teachers from Tlemcen University. Four holding *doctorate degree*, and one *Professor* holding "*doctorat d'état*". Their teaching experience varies from nine to thirty years, and they are in charge of the following modules: Linguistics, TEFL, Research methodology, Oral Expression, Phonetics, Linguistic Theories, Language and Culture, Communicative Language Testing and Sociolinguistics.

### B. Procedure

The primary focus of this study is to investigate the effect of test anxiety on linguistics exam scores. Therefore, through the use of a case study, the researcher opts for a combination of both quantitative and qualitative data collection procedure using a

triangulation process. Research tools vary from test anxiety questionnaire adopted from Speilberger (1966) consisting of a Lickert Scale, pulse rates taken before the linguistics test and the content –based test which was a linguistics exam. Questions on the survey coupled with pulse rates will be used to assign test anxiety levels for each student. In addition to this, a questionnaire will be addressed to teachers to cross –check data.

IV. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Regarding the first hypothesis, which revolved around the possible relationships existing between learners’ levels of anxiety and their test scores, a Pearson correlation coefficient *r* was then computed using SPSS. Statistic results of this operation are represented in the following table:

**Correlations<sup>a</sup>**

		Anxiety Score	Pulse rate
Anxiety Score	Pearson Correlation	1	+,184
	Sig. (2-tailed)		,329
	Sum of Squares and Cross-products	4788,300	-798,000
Pulse rate	Pearson Correlation	+,184	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	,329	
	Sum of Squares and Cross-products	-798,000	3910,000
	Covariance	-27,517	134,828

a. Listwise N=30  
 b. *r*=+.184

**Table 3. Pearson Correlation Coefficient**

Therefore, *r*= +.184. This denotes a positive association between learners’ pulse rates and their anxiety levels. Thus, as the pulse rates increased their level of anxiety increased and the test scores decreased and therefore, there is a direct proportion between the two variables.

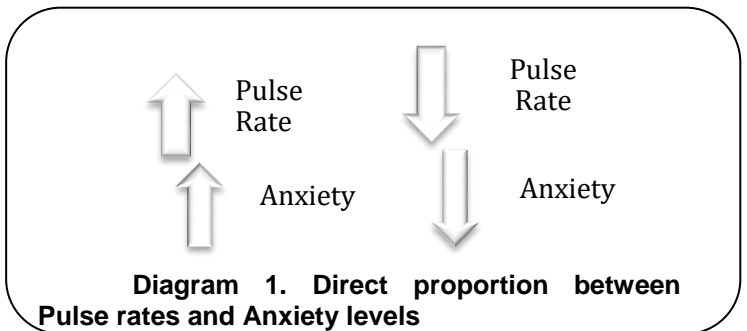
Thus, *r* = -.415. To statistically determine whether this value represents a positive relationship between the two variables notably: anxiety scores and the linguistics scores, it was compared with the *correlation value standards* (See Appendix G). positive values of *r* means a positive correlation which stands for a significant correlation between the variables. Conversely, a negative value of *r* means a negative correlation which denotes a negative accordance between the variables. The following table clearly elucidates this:

$r \leq -1$	$r \geq +1$
Negative Correlation	Positive correlation
No significant relationships between variables	Strong relationship between variables

**Table 2. Correlation significance**

Therefore, our findings denote that there is a negative statistical relationship between learners’ anxiety level and their test scores, i.e. anxiety level do not influence students’ scores as measured by Test Anxiety Inventory Questionnaire. Although students believe that there exist a relationship between their anxiety levels and their test scores, results proved that there exist no significant relationship between the two variables and by this, the first research hypothesis is rejected.

The second research question was examined through measuring learners pulse rates and was related it to their levels of anxiety. Pearson correlation coefficient was calculated as represented in the following table:



**Diagram 1. Direct proportion between Pulse rates and Anxiety levels**

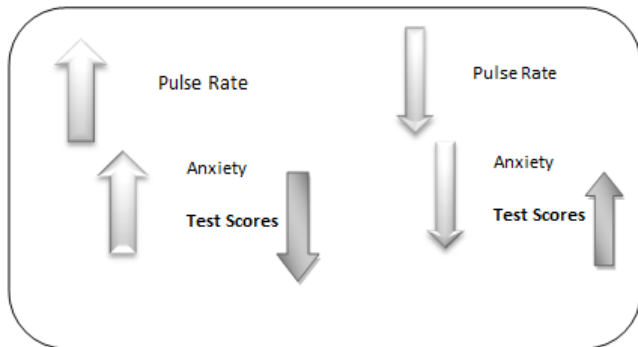
Since anxiety scores (as measure by Speilberger 1966 Test Anxiety Inventory) have no interference on learners test score and to cross check the results. It seems wiser from the part of the researcher to see the effect of pulse rates on students’ scores. Pearson correlation was calculated. Results are as follows:

**Correlations**

		Pulse rate	Test Score
Pulse rate	Pearson Correlation	1	+,272
	Sig. (1-tailed)		,073
Linguistics Score	Pearson Correlation	+,272	1
	Sig. (1-tailed)	,073	
	N	30	30

**Table 4. Pearson Coefficient of Pulse Rate and learners scores**

Since  $r = +.272$  this denotes a significant relationship between learners pulse rates and their linguistics scores and thus whenever learners pulse rates was high ltest anxiety level is high and therefore test scores are low and vices versa this can be presented in the following diagram:



**Diagram 2. Direct Proportion between the three variables**

Finally, trying to link the three variables together throughout this research work, it was found that there is a strong correlation relationship of the three variables: Test anxiety, pulse rate and test scores. Results reveal that there is a moderate negative relationship between test anxiety scores and their linguistics scores. Oddly enough, there is a significant relationship between learners pulse rates and their test scores. Thus, test anxiety cause elevated heartbeats which may be the reason of low school performance on tests.

The results obtained show that there is no significant relationship between test anxiety and learners test scores, as measured by Speilbergers test anxiety inventory. To cross check data pulse rates- base line pulse rates and test pulse rates- were both compared and correlated to learners' test scores and results show a positive relationships between anxiety and test scores as measured by pulse rates scales. Teachers agreed on the fact that highly anxious students with physiological changes tend to have low scores than those highly confidents learners.

It is, then, a shared responsibility to take actions and help learners overcome this state of fear before being tested. This can be achieved first by raising learners' awareness of the effect of test anxiety on their learning achievements and their psychological health states as well

## V. CONCLUSION

It is expected that this study would contribute to the world of educational psychology in general, and it would help learners and teachers become aware of the possible facts related to test anxiety to help them become more aware of the internal and external factors that affect their performances on standardized

test scores. The results could also help in the design and administration of tests so as to decrease test anxiety and increase test scores.

However, further studies are required to explore the possible relationship between test anxiety learning and performance. In this sense, one may wonder whether test anxiety may be lowered if one opts for Web-Based Assessment in High-Stakes testing. This may open the doors for further reading and future research.

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