Effects of assertiveness training on test anxiety of girl students in first grade of guidance school

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Abstract

The purpose of this study was to investigate the effect of assertiveness training on test anxiety of girl students in guidance schools. This study was a quasi-experimental design with pre-test post-test and two follow-ups. So among 74 students, 30 students who had test anxiety, were assigned as the experimental and control group (15 students in each group). The experimental group were taught assertiveness training for eight 50-minute sessions. The data were analyzed through ANOVA with repeated measuring. The results indicated that assertiveness training decreased the level of Test Anxiety in students significantly, and the reduction of Test Anxiety after assertiveness training remained stable over time.

Keywords: Assertiveness training, Test anxiety, Repeated measuring.

1. Introduction

It has been severally viewed that those students who are intellectually and potentially similar to each other will show a great difference in their academic achievements; even though are affected by many other variant factors as well. We cannot simply ignore the role of Test Anxiety in learners' evaluation. Sarason (1975) characterized Test Anxiety as a kind of Self preoccupation that is manifested in underestimation and minimizing self-potentials that is often resulted in negative cognition, lack of concentration, undesirable physiological reaction and decline in academic performance. It is then expected a significant negative relationship between Anxiety scores and test scores (cited in Lashkaripour et al., 2007).

Test anxiety is said to be prevalent in about 10 to 30 percent of students (Hoge, 1988). It will increase in primary schools with age and is formed at 10-11 and will prove sable and extend up to adulthood. It seems that girls would experience Test Anxiety more than the boys (Akrami, 1999; Abul-Ghasemi & Najariyan, 1998).

Assertiveness is an individual function which helps to adapt to social interaction, but its unsuccessful action will provoke Anxiety, stress, and personality disorder (Azais, Granger, Debray, and Ducroix, 1999 cited in Neisi & Shahni Yeylagh, 2001). According to Hersen & Belack (1976) assertiveness is the ability to express both the negative and positive in interpersonal situations with no worry about its consequences which accompanies presenting

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appropriate verbal and nonverbal answer in a large scope of interpersonal activities (cited in McCabe and Timmins, 2003). Wolp (1958) showed in his theory of “Reciprocal Inhibition” that behaving courageously at the time of Anxiety will inhibit anxiety. The main purpose of assertiveness training was to help individuals to change their attitude toward themselves and to improve their assertiveness to express their thoughts and emotions easily and to create self-confidence in themselves (Krupa & et al, 1999).

Regarding the effect of Assertiveness on Anxiety, it has been demonstrated that assertiveness has positive effect on some kind of Anxieties. Mahmoudi Alami et al. (2002) studied the effect of assertiveness on the level of anxiety in students and concluded that reduction in the level of anxiety in experimental group before and after assertiveness training was meaningful in comparison the control group. Mehrabizadeh et al. (2009) showed that assertiveness training will lead to a reduction in anxiety and an increase in social skills and academic performance of girl students in experimental group. Deluty (1981) indicated that those students who received assertiveness training showed a better academic achievement with an increase in their popularity. Paeizi et al. (2007) signified the effectiveness of assertiveness training on welfare and academic achievement of high-school girls. The results have shown that assertiveness training will increase the average score of academic achievement in experimental group in comparison to their pre-test with no meaningful difference while in the follow-up stage; there was a significant difference in their academic achievement scores.

Since assertiveness training will affect anxiety reduction, it is open to question that whether assertiveness training have any effect on test Anxiety? And will it remain stable over time?

2-Method

Since the main purpose of this study is to know the effect of assertiveness training on Test Anxiety, it is quasi-experimental and the design of the study is post-test and pre-test on control group. In order to prevent dispersion phenomena, two schools were chosen randomly from different school districts at Nobaran and after that one school was chosen as an experimental group and the other as a control group. The questionnaire of Test Anxiety was then filled in. Fifteen students were introduced as the people with Test Anxiety in each experimental and control groups. To increase the validity of this study, the variables of age, educational level, and sex were controlled.

2.1 Instrument

Test Anxiety questionnaire (TAI): it is consists of 25 items which the subjects will answer in multiple-choice scale (0=never, rarely=1, sometimes=2, often=3). Abul-Ghasemi et al. (1996) used Cronbach Coefficient Alpha to measure internal consistency. The results from Cronbach Coefficient Alpha for the total sample, girls and boys were respectively 0/94, 0/95, and 0/92. The correlation coefficients between the subjects’ scores in test and retest for all subjects, boys and girls were respectively 0/77, 0/88, and 0/67. To meet the validity of this scale, there were used the 58-item scale of self-esteem. The correlation coefficient of scores from Coopersmith self esteem with Test Anxiety scale for the total subjects, girls, and boys were respectively -0/57, -0/68, -0/43. At the present study, the validity of Test Anxiety was measured through Cronbach Coefficient Alpha, the alpha coefficient of which was equal to 0/91.

2.2 Procedure

This study ran in five stages.
1. Pre-test stage i.e., giving the Test Anxiety inventory on all of the first-grade students of two guidance schools.
2. Assertiveness training stage on experimental group using role play in eight sessions taking 50 minutes
3. The first Post-test stage: distributing Test Anxiety questionnaire between two groups immediately after the termination of the course
4. The second follow-up stage: distributing Test Anxiety questionnaire after two months from the last session of training
5. The third follow-up stage: redistributing Test Anxiety questionnaire after two months from the second follow-up (four months after training).
2. Findings

To analyze the data, two methods of descriptive and inferential analysis were used. To describe the tables of frequency, mean, standard deviation, etc. we used descriptive analysis and to get the detailed understandings of the role of experimental variable on dependent variable, we used Variance Analysis with repeated measures.

Table 1: mean and standard deviation of the level of Test Anxiety in terms of experimental and control group (N=30)

| Variables | groups | experimental (n=15) | control(n=15) |
|-----------|--------|---------------------|---------------|
|           | M      | sd                  | M             | sd |
| Pre-test  | 37.3   | 5.6                 | 37.4          | 6.7 |
| Test Anxiety | Post-test 1 | 29.5   | 7.7                  | 36.3          | 6.7 |
|           | 30.93  | 9.1                 | 35.93         | 6.3 |
|           | 30.73  | 8.7                 | 35.33         | 4.5 |

Table 1 shows that though the level of Test Anxiety in experimental and control groups in pre-test is quite the same, the post-test scores in experimental group is lower than the control group; while changes in the scores of the second and the third post-test is not significant compared with the first post-test.

Table 2: the summary of ANOVA for within-group factor (Test Anxiety) and between-group factor

| Source of Variation | Sum of squares | Degrees of freedom | Mean square | F     | Significance | Eta Square |
|---------------------|----------------|--------------------|-------------|-------|--------------|------------|
| Covariance          | 403.6          | 2.2                | 187.3       | 14.8  | 0.01         | 0.346      |
| group x covariance  | 183.3          | 2.2                | 85.07       | 6.7   | 0.01         | 0.194      |
| error               | 761.3          | 60.3               | 12.6        |       |              |            |

In table 2, the observed level of significance regarding the interactional effects of covariance with group is significantly meaningful (0/01) (F (2/2 , 60/3) = 6/7, p=0/01). We can conclude with the 99% confidence that the changes in Test Anxiety in pre-test and post-test in two groups of control and experimental are not the same. Changes in table 1 shows that the level of Test Anxiety in those subjects who received assertiveness training is significantly lower than those who did not receive these trainings. In another words, we can say that assertiveness training will decrease the level of Test Anxiety meaningfully. Eta is an indication to the fact that 19/4% of students’ Test Anxiety is under the influence of experimental and control groups.

Table 3: within-subjects contrast test of Test Anxiety in post-test one, two, and three

| Source of variation | Pair comparison | Sum of squares | df | Mean of square | Sig  | F   |
|---------------------|-----------------|----------------|----|----------------|------|-----|
| Covariance          | Pt 1 & Pt 2     | 3.3            | 1  | 3.3            | 0.37 | 0.55|
|                     | Pt 2 & Pt 3     | 4.8            | 1  | 2.8            | 0.43 | 0.55|
| Covariance x group  | Pt 1 & Pt 2     | 32.03          | 1  | 32.03          | 3.6  | 0.07|
|                     | Pt 2 & Pt 3     | 1.2            | 1  | 1.2            | 0.11 | 0.74|
| Error               | Pt 1 & Pt 2     | 250.6          | 28 | 8.95           |      |     |
|                     | Pt 2 & Pt 3     | 310            | 28 | 11.07          |      |     |
Table 3 shows that the amount of F in post-test of one, two, and three is not significant \((F(1,28), P>0.05)\). Indeed, the decrease in the level of Test Anxiety of subjects after assertiveness training remained stable.

### 4. Discussion

The results of the research showed that assertiveness training will decrease the level of Test Anxiety in students significantly. The result of comparing the subjects’ scores in post-test one and three for the sake of considering the stability of assertiveness training on reducing anxiety indicated that the reduction of Test Anxiety after assertiveness training remained stable over time. Based on the research backgrounds cited at the present study, we can suggest two processes: 1. Alteration in student’s Anxiety by equipping them with assertiveness. 2. Creating a positive feeling for the change in Test Situation.

Students could influence their teachers and staffs after training by using acquired skills appropriately. In their words, teacher’s behavior in reaction to their request for further explanation and solving problems were aggressive and disrespectful before training; they had no patience to receive any kind of criticism and were used to attribute all the mistakes to student's ignorance and inattentiveness.

Base on student’s reflections after each training session, the acquired skill regarding teachers, friends, and staff were also used. It seems that the students in their continual training in assertiveness could interact with their teachers better than before. They could have their request easily for further information and have no feeling of embarrassment in any cases that they did not get something, feel more self-confidence in themselves and extend a good relationship with their friends. They could reflect all these skills in their behaviors and turn it more internal over time. According to Campbell & Fehr (1990), those students with assertiveness skills such as requesting (say yes and say no) have more ability in interacting with their friends, teachers, and families that will result in a high self-esteem. It is then that the student will position himself/herself in a way that can claim his/her right while respecting others.

In contrast, unsuccessful students due to insufficient communicative experience would assess their talents and abilities negatively; the level of self-esteem is low in them. The students will recognize that using assertiveness skills such as ‘positive feelings’, ‘negative feelings’ and ‘constructive criticism’ can control his/her surrounding milieu and can manipulate the nature actively and consciously. One will get familiar that by using ‘constructive criticism’ and ‘negative feelings’ can deal better with others without the feeling of guilt (Natvige et al., 2003).

In addition, assertiveness is a skill requires practice to turn normal. It seems that those students with Test Anxiety will usually think of: “if I fail…?! What should I do?!; if I get a bad score, the teacher would hammer me.; if I got a bad score, my parents would get sad… these thoughts will appear in different levels of anxiety which operates as an inhibition to get the ideal score. Reviewing the same thoughts in the next exam will augment the Anxiety which will consequently affect students’ performance. It is difficult to eliminate this vicious chain; students must create self-awareness in themselves and keep their self-confidence in balance. One of the purposes of assertiveness training is to get to this true self-awareness. While training sessions, one will learn how to recognize negative self-awareness and then turn them into positive one. Thereby, one can learn how to extend his/her self-awareness to deal with negative habits. These negative thoughts are shaped over time so changing them requires the more application of contrastive trends regularly. Through regular practices, one can reach to desires status.

Reviewing the Previous studies and considering the present study, we can claim that assertiveness training is a suitable trend in reducing Test Anxiety of students. Educational centers can therefore practice assertiveness training along with other methods to reduce Test Anxiety.

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