Test Preparation: Reducing EFL Test-takers’ Stressful Barriers

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Abstract
This study tried to verify whether EFL teachers provide their students with test taking strategies and prepare them well in advance in order to reduce the stressful barriers that face them when taking tests. The theoretical framework of this study covered relevant material on the subject matter in order to shorten the gap between tests and test takers in this regard. The instrument used was a questionnaire based on material close to test preparation and test stress. It includes (20) items, each one on was based on a 5-point Likert Scale ranging from "strongly agree" to "strongly disagree". It was given to (100) Sudanese university students of English as a foreign language. The aim of this questionnaire was to collect data needed to make the statistical analyses and to check them against the hypotheses of the study. The data obtained analyzed by using (SPSS) program. Descriptive analysis was also used to calculate the means and the standard deviations for each item of the questionnaire. The findings proved that stress did not promote students to study well in advance of the examinations. Furthermore students did not familiarize themselves with the type of questions that will be given before taking the test. Interestingly, students found their test stress reduced when they started to study more regularly. Based on these findings, it has been recommended that teachers should encourage their students to form study groups. Their aim is to exchange knowledge and provide support and encouragement for one another. Students should not have frantic review just before the test time, it will be more confusing methods than helpful ones. Finally, no meaningful correlation was found due to gender and test stress.

Keywords: barriers, Test stress, EFL students, test taking strategies

INTRODUCTION
The prospect of a test can be stressful for both teachers and students. One of the best ways to reduce stress levels surrounding tests for teachers and students is to work together on test-taking strategies. In a review of the literature on test preparation and test-taking strategies, most educators offer specific strategies that students can employ before the test, at the start of the test, during the test and after the test. Teaching test taking strategies was investigated by several studies. For example, Dolly and Williams (1986) investigated the effect of teaching test-taking strategies on improving students' scores on exam. Test-taking strategies used in the study included selecting the correct option by guessing the strategies of option length, similarities or oppositeness, and deduction. These strategies were given on a one-hour/ discussion to 25 sophomore

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students who enrolled in an education class. The performance of these students was compared with that of a control group (29 students) who received nothing by using a 48-item test. Results indicated that students in the experimental group outperformed students in the control group.

Sweetnam (2000) investigated the relationship between teaching test-taking strategies and improving classroom test scores. The study involved (22) fourth grade students (10 girls and 12 boys) who were taught specific test-taking strategies and skills in a weekly workshop for a semester. Test-taking strategies used included motivation, relaxation techniques, and actual test strategies. Students were encouraged to use these strategies in each test given in school. Results showed a significant gain in students’ scores when measured at the end of the year using Iowa test of basic Skills (ITBS).

As a part of a study about sex differences in test-taking strategies for problem solving on math, Gallagher (1992) examined the hypothesis that differences in test performance on math between males and females are the results of differences in students’ strategies for solving math problems. Subjects were high-scoring examinees on the SAT-mathematics. Results showed significant differences in strategies used by males and females in math test.

Vattanapath and Jaiprayoon (1999) investigated the effectiveness of teaching test-strategies for multiple-choice tests on achieving higher scores in English tests. Sixty first-year nursing students participated in the study. The experimental group received training in test-taking strategies for (10) weekly sessions, each 20 minutes long. At the end of the semester, the groups’ performance was compared to that of a control group using a 40-item multiple-choice test. It was found the experimental group outperformed the control group. Participants also developed positive attitudes toward the learning of test-taking strategies and started to use them in real testing situations.

Carraway (1987) studied the effect of teaching a test-taking seminar on decreasing test anxiety and increasing test scores. The level of test anxiety was measured using the test Anxiety Inventory (TAI) developed by Spielberger (1980). Using experimental and control groups from (30) nursing students who enrolled in a community college, it was found that students who participated in the seminar had significantly lower levels of test anxiety and significantly higher test scores than students who did not participate.

While many of the strategies in these areas fall within the language teacher’s domain, others remain the students’ responsibility. A number of test preparation strategies, however, are the responsibility of both teachers and students working together.

Most students experience some level of stress before and during tests. However, when stress affects tests performance negatively, it becomes a problem. Several students participate in the class, do activities, homework, and come well prepared for the test, but when the day of the test comes, some of them freeze up, zone out, or feel so nervous that they cannot pass the test. Hence, they cannot respond properly to the questions, even if they know their answers. This is a clear case of test stress. The nervous feeling that students sometimes undergo when they are about to take a test is in general, a normal feeling. For some test takers, however, this normal stress becomes more intense. This
kind of influential nervousness they feel before and during a test can be strong to the extent where it interferes with their concentration and performance.

The researcher intends to trace the causes of this stress among the students of the Department of English, College of Education at Gezira University, Sudan. He intends to investigate the stressful barriers encounter EFL students when taking tests and to provide students with some specific test preparation strategies to overcome these barriers.

In order to perform well in a challenging situation, one must be psychologically and physically alert. Although a little test stress can be a good thing, an overdose of it is another problem. If sitting for a test gets someone so stressed out that his mind goes blank and causes him to miss answers that he knows, then his level of test stress may probably need some attention. His teacher can suggest useful resources to talk to if he always gets extreme test stress (Sweetnam, 2002). Stress can be created by a person’s expectations concerning what is likely to happen. These expectations may be expressed in words to oneself, mental pictures, or physical symptoms. If a student believes, for example, that he is going to perform poorly, has not studied enough, or will appear foolish, he will have an emotional reaction consistent with these expectations. The mental state of the student produces a corresponding emotional reaction. Some students can ace a test without studying, and some students will sit in their seat before a test and become stressful. Test stress refers to the emotional reactions students get because they know a test is coming up. This fear is normal because how they do on a test reflects in their grades.

Tests are used as a universal tool for decision-making in most educational and non-educational institutions, and students are evaluated according to their achievement on these tests. As a result, a major concern for students and teachers worldwide is the ability to perform better on tests (Al Fraidan & Al-Khalaf, 2012). Studies indicate that students with test-taking skills improved attitudes towards tests, demonstrated lower levels of stress, and achieved better results (Peng, 2005; Perney & Ravid, 1990; Steele & Arth, 1998). Even students familiar with the subject matter may do poorly in tests due to poor test-taking skills (Sweetnam, 2002).

As mentioned above, test preparation and test-taking strategies have received an increasing research attention in the field of language assessment for their importance in narrowing the gap between tests and test takers. Test stress has become one of the current challenges in foreign language teaching to provide students with a low-stressful classroom environment. Thus this study investigates the barriers encounter EFL students when taking tests; mainly the problems which arouse their test stress. This study assumes that teaching test-taking strategies will result in increasing students' overall scores in their tests. It is also assumed that having such strategies will reduce the level of test stress, and improve students’ overall attitudes toward tests.

Many useful strategies teachers can inform their students about them in order to perform well in their examinations. Some of them can be presented as follows:
1. Students should stay on a reasonably regular schedule of reviewing, eating, sleeping, and relaxing. They revise at least a week, or preferably two, before their tests begin.

2. Students should not force themselves to study beyond their normal limits of concentration. If they find themselves able to concentrate for only ten or twenty minutes, they study for only that period of time and then take a short break (Casbarro, 2005).

Test stress can be devastating to test results. Students must reduce their stress to a manageable level. These tips can be pursued in order to minimize test stress.

1. Students should allow themselves enough time to get to class without feeling rushed.

2. They scan the test and answer the questions they know first. This will be a great confidence builder (Casbarro, 2005).

Furthermore, (Budd, 2002: 3) offers helpful tips to relieve exam anxiety including:

1. No textbooks: Students have to make sure that they do not only understand the information when they do the work, but also they remember the material from the first time they study it well enough to pass a test.

2. Stress: Taking tests adds stress. Students' performance tends to deteriorate under stress. Thus, they need to learn the material well enough to remember it under stress.

3. Time pressure: Students have studied several chapters and lessons, learned hundreds of facts, concepts, processes, and solutions in many days. They will need to remember this rapidly in one forty-five minute test setting.

When studying with a textbook, they check each chapter outline. They will be valuable in at least two ways: as a check to see how well they remember the chapter after studying it the first time, and as a way of remembering the material. They remember more details longer if they are organized. The chapter outline will usually provide an organization for text and lesson materials. Students certainly test themselves after studying so that they will remember the material on the test day and in fact the textbook will not be in front of them when they are taking the test. Short and regular study periods are more productive than lengthy single sessions.

It is mentioned earlier that the best way to prevent stress is to fully prepare for the test. Students should avoid cramming, and instead, they find clever ways in memorizing or learning the material. Instructors can inform their students that when studying for the test, they ask themselves what questions may be asked and try to answer them by integrating ideas from notes, texts, and supplementary readings. Furthermore, if they are unable to cover all the material given throughout the semester or the term, they select a portion that they can cover well. They can set a goal of presenting their knowledge of this information on the test.

Liu (2004: 1) suggests a stress control procedure as follows:

1. Students turn the test paper over and close their eyes.
2. They breathe in slowly to the count of seven and exhale to the count of seven.
3. They continue this slow breathing until they begin to feel more relaxed.
4. They open their eyes, turn the test paper right side up, and give themselves a positive self-talk.

To overcome this phenomenon; parents, students as well as teachers should play a crucial and effective role to reduce these stressful barriers. For example parents prepare their children for the test and students have confidence and teachers reduce the stress by facilitating the items of the test.

Attending class regularly, is a key to test preparation. The information on a test is usually presented, analyzed and reviewed in class. Students need to be in class when the teacher gives hints about what the test will mainly be on, so they can concentrate their studying and limit the amount of time it takes them. Reviewing class notes is another essential step towards successful studying habits. Students should review these notes on a regular basis, not in the last minutes. Letting the notes sink in over time will expand their knowledge on the subject and giving them more of a complete understanding of the material (Brodsky, 2004).

Furthermore, students do whatever works best for their learning habits. While studying need to keep a positive attitude. If they say they can’t do something, they can’t. However, if they say they can, and they deserve to, then they will achieve so much more. They actually need to refresh themselves on the subjects at hand, by reading headings and subheading, concentrating on any bold words, reading any summary sections, reviewing their notes and reading these things aloud. The three types to reading that they can use when studying are: comprehensive reading, which is reading it all word for word and making note cards. Skimming is just reading for the main ideas, it normally doesn't give them many details. The last way is newspaper reading, also referred to as the magazine style, which is ideal for a final reading.

Students should start preparing for the test. They should familiarize themselves with the type of exam that will be given. Preparation for a multiple-choice test is different from an essay test. By knowing what type of test is being given, studying will be easy. Instructors can explain to their students good methods of how to take subjective, objective and oral tests in order to reduce their test stress.

Instructors commonly give essay tests to reveal a student's ability to make valid generalizations and to support them with sound evidence, and to apply broad principles to a series of instances. Thus, the students make sure that they know the information and to write a concise outline, covering the material.

Many students think that an essay test question can be one of the most difficult to study. They can identify this type of question on the test by looking for key words such as list, name, define or identify. Krivoshik (2003: 1) lists some of the needed techniques and tips to do well on an essay test. They are as follows:

1. Read all directions before beginning.
2. Read all of the questions and underline key words and circle direction words.
3. Jot down cues that come to mind as you read or answer the questions.
4. Be sure your answer is well organized and complete.
5. Outlines can help organize thoughts.
6. Don’t leave anything to be inferred or concluded by the instructor.
7. Don’t use a long general introduction.
8. Emphasize new points by using new paragraphs and signal words.
9. Always try to justify your answer to essay questions.
10. Write legibly in ink on one side of the paper - neat work often receives higher grade.
11. Try to present factual details as much as possible.

Test-takers should check their work for spelling and grammatical errors and illegible handwriting. In reading through the exam, they check that the conclusion is well-supported and that the introduction corresponds with the conclusion.

Milnamow (2001: 1-2) has also listed seven brief and essential steps in answering an essay test:

1. Set up a time schedule. (Allow yourself a certain amount of time on each question).
2. Read through the questions once.
3. Before attempting to answer a question, look at the directive words. (the directions)
4. Outline the answer before writing.
5. Take time to write an introduction and summary.
6. Take time at the end to reread the paper.
7. Qualify answers when in doubt. (It’s better to say "Towards the end of the 19th century" than to say "in 1894" when you cannot remember if it’s 1884 or 1894.

Students need to be prepared effectively for taking essay tests. They can list carefully any course material and lectures notes that they have and observe any repeated themes. They can think of any possible essay questions from this information and write them down. It is suggested that a week or two before taking the test, the students can create a summery sheet for each major topic that they generate from their course material. This seems to be an efficient way to highlight the significant themes of a unit.

It is important in preparing for an essay test to determine relationships between ideas and assessing how these connections can be used as essay questions. Before writing, the students can jot ideas down and thinking through the questions, budgeting time and to allow time for proofreading, understanding what is being asked, starting with the easy questions, determining the general answer, and separating the issues that they choose to use as support for their argument. While writing, the students make sure that the answer proves a direct point (Milnamow, 2001).

In general, when students prepare for an essay test they should have a wide knowledge about the topic and should be very organized. This will help them to be well-prepared for taking the test.

Students most probably prefer multiple choice questions because the correct answer is right in front of them and all one has to do is determine what is right and what is wrong.
Chargar (2002: 4) discusses why multiple choice tests are easier than essay tests, and why it can also be more difficult. He says

Multiple choice tests are easier for three reasons: 1) it is guaranteed that the correct answer is given so you would not have to produce and answer, 2) comparisons and definitions are emphasized so no analyses are involved, and 3) there are a lot of questions so each question has a low point value.

Multiple choice tests are more difficult in that they cover a greater range of information, they force students to be familiar with minute details, and because they are so difficult to write, an instructor may have two very similar given answers and the student could easily choose the wrong one (Stevenson, 2002).

The rules when the students take this type of test are that they should read all of the possible choices, sometimes there might be a better choice. To manage their time, they answer the questions that they are confident about and mark the ones that they are not. They should not leave any blank unless points are taken off. The students try to answer the question without looking at the options. They eliminate obviously wrong answers. They should be careful when they read "the all of the above" or "none of the above". One of them could be a distractor, but it could also be the right choice. The students should watch out for key words such as negatives or superlatives, or even words that might identify a true statement. They must not overanalyze questions.

Fieber (2001: 1-2) has listed numerous techniques and strategies which will increase one's ability to do well on a multiple choice question test. He suggests to:

1. break the question into the stem and the alternatives.
2. underline the key elements of the question and any information that will help pick an answer choice.
3. read the question a few times in order to ensure that they understand what the question is asking about.
4. replace the words they are unsure of with a synonym that they completely understand, that is, if they run into unfamiliar vocabulary.
5. think of a correct answer before looking at the answer choices, then see if any of the answer choices are the same or similar to what they thought.
6. use the process of elimination by reading every choice before you pick the choice which seems correct, comparing the answer choices, eliminating the ones you know are incorrect, and treating "all of the above", "none of the above", "A and B", and so on., as a true or false question.
7. mark the question if you don’t know its answer so that they can come back to it if they have time at the end of the test.
8. go over your answer sheet at the end of the test to make sure that they didn’t leave any question blank unintentionally. Never leave a question blank unless there is a penalty for guessing.
9. check that their answers correspond to the correct question.
10. stick with their initial answer since, more often than not their changed answer is wrong more often than their first choice.
Young (2003: 1) also presents four additional useful tips for taking multiple-choice tests. They are as follows:

1. Eliminate words, such as always, no, and never. Longer statements are usually true, because it takes longer and more words to make a true statement true.
2. Choose options that directly match the stem, identifying key words in the stem identifies the question being asked.
3. Choose options that make sense based on logical reasoning and their background information.
4. Choose options that make a true statement when combined with the stem.

These guidelines give a practice to test out students' new skill by using these types of questions.

The techniques of reviewing the material and preparing a list of questions, could also be used in any class discussion. Krivoshik (2003: 2) mentions a basic definition of an oral test. She says"...an oral exam is an opportunity for you to demonstrate your knowledge, your presentation/speaking skills, as well as your ability to communicate and can be either formal or informal". However, this strongly emphasizes the idea of making a good impression of performing well on the oral tests.

A student in a normal group discussion will be more able to participate and contribute to the class by reviewing the material and thinking of questions that may be presented during the discussion. Similarly, practicing in front of a mirror will aid a test-taker in an oral test as much as a student who is shy and afraid to speak in class. Avoiding rambling, answering concisely, using good eye contact, and supporting one's answers also contribute highly to the impression a student makes on the instructor during a class discussion as well as in an oral test Krivoshik (2003).

It is mentioned earlier that test stress is the uneasiness or apprehension that a student feels before, during or after a test because of worry or fear of failure. Evans (1995) provides some hints to help parents manage their children's test stress.

1. Parents should make sure their sons and daughters has enough sleep, eat a healthy breakfast and gets to school on time.
2. They also should make sure their sons and daughters have the needed school supplies (notebooks, pencils, and so on).
3. Doing well on a test is easier if a student has been consistently completing school assignments, including studying or reading.
4. Parents should encourage their sons and daughters to complete homework each day, which is very important and helpful.
5. They should motivate their sons and daughters to take a test. They can do this by reinforcing their efforts, including the studying and homework tasks, rather than focusing on having to make a certain grade.
6. Parents should help their sons and daughters reduce fear and stress. This can be accomplished with enthusiasm, praise and small rewards for giving their best effort in spite of feeling worried.
7. Anxious sons and daughters tend to have many negative thoughts. Parents can teach their sons and daughters to challenge these ideas by looking at the evidence against each negative thought they can help them to find a more optimistic thought to use whenever the negative ones arise.

It is the teacher’s responsibility to help students make what is known as an exam plan. This plan is a “test-attack strategies” that students can employ at the start of, or during, the test. According to (Al-Hamly and Coombe, 2003), the six recommended areas to cover in an exam plan are:

1. Preview the test paper before answering anything. This practice gets students thinking about the material. Point values for each question and exam section should be noted so that students can effectively budget their time. Students should be encouraged to allocate their time proportional to the value of each exam section and to allow time to review their work.

2. Read test direction carefully. Students often think that reading direction carefully takes time away from the exam. This is not true as reading directions carefully actually saves time rather than wastes it. It is crucial that students are trained to read and listen to all direction carefully. One of the most important test-taking skills students can have is the ability to follow direction. Some students are so anxious to get started on the test that they skip the directions altogether, which is often a costly mistake (Lane, 2001; Coombe and Hubley, 1998).

3. Use test troubleshooting techniques. Teachers need to provide students with troubleshooting techniques for tests. One such a problem is the questions that students cannot answer or go blank on. If students get stuck on a question, teachers should train them to try to remember a related fact or retrieve information from their short-term memory. This can be accomplished by going from the general to the specific. Another strategy that teachers can help students with is to encourage them to look for answers or memory triggers in other sections of the test. Whatever happens, if students get stuck on a question, they should be trained to not spend too much time trying to answer it. Instead, they should move on to another question as they can always go back to problem questions should time allow (Loulou, 1995).

4. Make educated guesses. One of the areas where teacher/student collaboration can be especially useful is that of guessing strategies. When uncertain of the correct answer to a test item, it is important to encourage students to make reasonable guesses. If done intelligently, guessing is a good strategy.

5. Use strategies appropriate to the skill area. Teachers should train students in effective strategies for the various language skill areas to be tested (Coombe and Hubley, 1998). If the test includes short answer, essay and multiple-choice questions, encourage students to complete the multiple-choice part first. Students should be trained to read all options carefully and eliminate those that are clearly wrong. Students should move on to short answer questions before attempting essay-type questions. By answering objective questions first, this will help
students remember the material and make connections between concepts. The question may also contain information that can be used to answer essay questions.

6. A common phenomenon during a test is that students become stressed if they feel they are working more slowly than others are. Seeing that other students are farther along on the test should not cause students to change their strategies or exam plan (Gall and Gall, 1993).

7. Each test should be a learning experience for both the teacher and the students. Teachers should go over test results with students in a timely manner making a note of specific students’ strengths and weaknesses. The analyses that teachers receive after exams provides them with invaluable information that can be used to give students the necessary remediation they need for future exams. Students need to use the feedback they get from test results to master material that they did not do well on.

It is expected from this study to provide the students with a low-stressful classroom environment. In addition to reduce students’ test stress through study habits and test taking strategies.

**METHOD**

**Participants**

The population of this study involves EFL students from Gezira University in Sudan. This population includes a considerable number of students at the Department of English, College of Education. The selection of the sample framework was chosen from the total group of students who represent the community of students in the Department of English. The sample involves (50) female students and (50) male students. Their ages range from (20) to (24) years old.

**Materials**

The instrument concerns of the field study is carried out by using a questionnaire intended for the sample of students participated in this study. The items of this questionnaire are grouped into two parts. Part one is to generate personal data and part two includes statements based on review of literature related to the causes of test stress. Multiple-type of questions are chosen because they are easier to answer and can also be analyzed easily.

**Procedure**

The responses of (100) students for the questionnaire items are tabulated and their responses are computed by applying the arithmetic mean ($\bar{x}$) and the standard deviation (SD) for each statement to test the hypotheses round the mean by using the paired-sample (t) test at (.05) level of significance. The Paired-Samples T Test procedure is used to compare the means of two variables. It computes the differences between values of the two variables for each case and tests whether the average differs from each other.
Measures

Alpha is designed as a measure of internal consistency. This is a model of internal consistency, based on the average inter-item correlation.

The following formula determines alpha:

\[ a = \frac{kr}{1 + (k - 1)} \]

Where: (K = number of items) (r = average correlation)

N of Cases = 562.0  N of items = 20

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Correlations</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Minimum</th>
<th>Maximum</th>
<th>Range</th>
<th>Max/Min</th>
<th>Variance</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1296</td>
<td>-.0455</td>
<td>.4087</td>
<td>.4542</td>
<td>-8.9765</td>
<td>---</td>
<td>---------</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(K = number of items = 20) (r = inter-item correlation mean = 0.1296)

\[ a = 20 \times 0.1296 \quad 1 + (20 - 1) 0.1296 \]

Cronbach’s Alpha is (0.72) and this indicates the questionnaire items are highly reliable.

The statistical method needed for the questionnaire analysis was done through Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) programme. The researcher used the paired-samples (t) test procedure to analyze students’ responses. A table of norms on which the respondents’ decision made, is as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Mean range</th>
<th>Interpretation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>More than (3) points</td>
<td>Strongly agree</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>From (2) to (3) points</td>
<td>Agree</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 points</td>
<td>Neutral</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>From (1) to less than (2) points</td>
<td>Strongly disagree</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Less than (1) point</td>
<td>Disagree</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

RESULTS

In this section the researcher presents the data collected through the questionnaire. The responses of (50) male students and of (50) female students are tabulated and their responses are computed by applying the arithmetic mean (x) and the standard deviation (SD) for each statement to test the hypotheses around the mean by using the paired-sample (t) test at (.05) level of significance. The Paired-Samples T Test procedure is used to compare the means of two variables. It computes the differences between values of the two variables for each case and tests whether the average differs from each other. This helps in giving judgments on each response separately.
Table 4. Descriptive Statistics of the Students Questionnaire

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No.</th>
<th>Statements</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>SD</th>
<th>T test</th>
<th>p-value</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>The teacher embarrasses me when I give incorrect answers in the classrooms.</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>4.33</td>
<td>0.66</td>
<td>1.463</td>
<td>.133</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>4.10</td>
<td>1.03</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>The teacher gives hints about what the test will mainly be on.</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>4.39</td>
<td>0.67</td>
<td>6.372</td>
<td>.001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>3.15</td>
<td>1.43</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>I make summary sheets for each major topic generated from my course material.</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>4.17</td>
<td>0.91</td>
<td>4.773</td>
<td>.116</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>2.88</td>
<td>1.46</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Before taking the test, I familiarize myself with the type of questions that will be given.</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>4.01</td>
<td>0.98</td>
<td>4.766</td>
<td>.445</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>3.77</td>
<td>1.19</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>My family and I take care of my physical health during the examination period.</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>3.98</td>
<td>1.04</td>
<td>3.070</td>
<td>.003</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>3.13</td>
<td>1.32</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Stress reminds me to study well in advance of the examination.</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>3.91</td>
<td>0.77</td>
<td>1.767</td>
<td>.072</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>3.88</td>
<td>1.13</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>I find my test stress is reduced when I start to study more regularly.</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>4.11</td>
<td>0.60</td>
<td>7.301</td>
<td>.001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>3.00</td>
<td>1.25</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Last minute cramming makes the information disorganized in my brain.</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>4.00</td>
<td>0.71</td>
<td>1.223</td>
<td>.004</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>4.06</td>
<td>0.76</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>I experience nervousness or apprehension before the test.</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>4.12</td>
<td>0.60</td>
<td>11.654</td>
<td>.001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>2.55</td>
<td>1.07</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>I experience nervousness or apprehension during the test.</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>4.14</td>
<td>0.77</td>
<td>7.230</td>
<td>.002</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>2.45</td>
<td>1.12</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>I experience nervousness or apprehension after the test.</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>3.67</td>
<td>0.78</td>
<td>6.235</td>
<td>.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>2.58</td>
<td>1.17</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>Teachers teach us study skills and test taking strategies.</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>3.88</td>
<td>0.67</td>
<td>3.471</td>
<td>.080</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>3.37</td>
<td>1.43</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>Short study periods are more productive than lengthy single sessions.</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>3.91</td>
<td>0.58</td>
<td>6.132</td>
<td>.060</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>2.34</td>
<td>1.11</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>Teachers use clear instructions when writing their tests.</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>3.87</td>
<td>0.67</td>
<td>5.347</td>
<td>.658</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>3.76</td>
<td>1.33</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15</td>
<td>During the examination I feel that brain is not working right.</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>4.11</td>
<td>0.68</td>
<td>7.065</td>
<td>.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>2.77</td>
<td>1.28</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16</td>
<td>I answer the questions that I know first when taking the test.</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>3.44</td>
<td>4.45</td>
<td>5.478</td>
<td>.055</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>2.99</td>
<td>3.66</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17</td>
<td>It is difficult to accept mistakes that I might make.</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>2.76</td>
<td>4.25</td>
<td>6.160</td>
<td>.003</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>2.88</td>
<td>2.90</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18</td>
<td>It is difficult to accept a score which is less than the perfect score.</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>3.21</td>
<td>4.21</td>
<td>7.968</td>
<td>.431</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>2.78</td>
<td>4.04</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19</td>
<td>My family praises and rewards me when I get good grades.</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>3.46</td>
<td>4.21</td>
<td>9.65</td>
<td>.710</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>3.12</td>
<td>2.10</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20</td>
<td>My parents, brothers, sisters and friends blame me when I get poor grades.</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>3.01</td>
<td>4.15</td>
<td>6.982</td>
<td>.040</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>2.87</td>
<td>2.60</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>All items</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>61.92</td>
<td>8.07</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>47.56</td>
<td>6.46</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In the above table, one sample t test is used to test if the opinion of the respondents in the content of the statements are positive or negative, i.e. if the p-value is less or greater than (0.05). The questionnaire statements are analyzed statistically as follows:
1. In statement (1) the means are (4.33) and (4.10) for males and females respectively and p-value is (0.133) which is greater than (0.05). This indicates that teachers do not embarrass the students when they give incorrect answers.

2. In the second statement, the means are (4.39) and (3.15) and p-value is (0.001) which is less than (0.05). This emphasizes that teachers give some hints about what the test will main be on.

3. The third statement has male students mean of (4.17) and female students of (2.88). Furthermore, it has p-value of (0.116) which is greater than (0.05). This indicates students do not make summary sheets for major topics generated from their course material.

4. In the fourth statement, the means of males is (4.01) and of females is (2.88). The p-value is (0.445) which is greater than (0.05). This explains that students do not familiarize themselves with the type of questions that will be given before taking the test.

5. In statement (5) the means are (3.98) and (3.13) for males and females respectively and p-value is (0.003) which is less than (0.05). This emphasizes that families take care of their sons' and daughters' physical health during the examinations period.

6. Statement (6) has mean of (3.91) male students and (3.88) for female students. The p-value is (0.072) which is greater than (0.05). This reflects that stress does not promote students to study well in advance of the examinations.

7. In statement (7), the mean of male students is (4.01) and of female students is (3.00). The p-value is (0.001) which is less than (0.05). This explains that students find their test stress reduces when they start to study more regularly.

8. The two means in statement (8) are (4.00) and (4.06) for males and females respectively. The p-value is (0.004) which is less than (0.05). This indicates that last minute cramming makes the information disorganized in their brains.

9. In statement (9), the mean of male students is (4.12) and of female students is (2.55). The p-value is (0.001) which is less than (0.05). This reflects that students experience nervousness or apprehension before the test.

10. Statement (10) includes two means, the male students mean is (4.14) and the female students is (2.45). The p-value is (0.002) which is less than (0.05). This explains that students experience nervousness or apprehension during the test.

11. Statement (11) presents two means: one of them is the male students mean which is (3.67) and the other is of the female students which is (2.58). The p-value is (0.000) which is less than (0.05). This explains that students experience nervousness or apprehension after the test.

12. In statement (12), the male students mean is (3.88) and of the female students is (3.37). The p-value is (0.080) which is greater than (0.05). This indicates that teachers do not teach their students study skills and strategies of test taking.

13. The mean of male students in statement (13) is (3.91) and of the female students is (2.34). The p-value is (0.060) which is greater than (0.05). This means that students consider short study periods are more productive than lengthy single sessions.
14. Statement (14) shows two close means. The males mean is (3.87) and the females one is (3.76). The p-value is (0.658) which is greater than (0.05). This emphasizes that teachers do not use clear instructions when they write tests.

15. In statement (15), the mean of the male students mean is (4.11) and of the female students is (2.77). The p-value is (0.000) which is less than (0.05). This indicates that during the examination students feel their brains are not working right.

16. Statement (16) has males mean of (3.44) and females mean of (2.99). The p-value is (0.155) which is greater than (0.05). This emphasizes that students do not answer the questions that they know first when they take tests.

17. Statement (17) recorded a mean of (2.76) for males and (2.88) for females. The p-value is (0.003) which is less than (0.05). This indicates that it is difficult for students to accept the mistakes they make when taking tests.

18. Having analyzed the data provided in statement (18), it could be noticed that male students have mean of (3.21) and of female students of (2.78). The p-value is (0.431) which is greater than (0.05). Due to this statistics, it seems that students do not accept a score which is less than the perfect score.

19. According to the statistics of statement (19), the male students have mean of (3.46) and the female students have mean of (3.12). The p-value is (0.710) which is greater than (0.05). This emphasizes that families do not praise and reward their sons and daughters when they get good grades.

20. Based on the descriptive statistics of statement (20), the male students have mean of (3.01) and the female students have mean of (2.87). The p-value is (0.040) which is less than (0.05). This implies that students’ parents, brothers, sisters and friends blame them when they get poor grades.

Testing the Hypotheses

The hypotheses of this study were tested by using the paired-sample (t) test method. The level of significance was at (0.05). If the P-value was less than (0.05), there was a significant difference and if the P-value was greater than (0.05), there was no significant difference. This procedure is to reject or accept the hypotheses.

1- Students’ test reduced when they studied earlier and more regularly.

In table (4.1) statement (7) shows that the mean of male students is (4.01) and of female students is (3.00). The p-value is (0.001) which is less than (0.05). This explains that students find that their test stress reduces when they start to study more regularly. These results indicate the acceptance of this hypothesis.

2- Teachers taught their students study skills and strategies of test taking.

Referring to tables (4.1), statement (12), it is noticed that the male students mean is (3.88) and of the female students is (3.37). The p-value is (0.080) which is greater than (0.05). This indicates that teachers do not teach their students study skills and strategies of test taking. Based on the p-value, this hypothesis is rejected.

3- Families took care of their sons and daughters during their examinations.
Reviewing the information in table (4.1), in particular statement (5) the means are (3.98) and (3.13) for males and females respectively and p-value is (0.003) which is less than (0.05). This emphasizes that families take care of their sons' and daughters' physical health during the examinations period. According to these results, this hypothesis is accepted.

4- Last minute cramming made the students more stressful.

The two means in statement (8), table (4.1) are (4.00) and (4.06) for males and females respectively. The p-value is (.004) which is less than (.05). This indicates that last minute cramming makes the information disorganized in their brains. These results reflect the correctness of this hypothesis

CONCLUSION

This study investigates the causes of test stress. The main reason for conducting this study is the practical need for such a research in this field. The results of the students' questionnaires reveal that teachers familiarize their students with the format of the test that they will take. Although the results of this study indicated that the participating students (both males and females) do not have the appropriate test-taking skills they need to ensure acceptable levels of achievement. It seems that families rarely praise and reward their sons and daughters when they get good grades. In addition to students do not make summary sheets for major topics generated from their course material in order to prepare themselves well for the test. Furthermore, students who become stressful while taking tests do not actually suffer from test stress, but from the stress that comes from not being prepared. It is noticed that students blame test stress on poor grades, but it could be that they do not have the right study skills habits. In addition, students who have notes and have already learned the material, will not be stressful. Last minute studying only increases students' stress and inhibits their ability to remember things they learned a while ago. It is observed that one of the most recurrent problems students encounter when taking essay tests is that they frequently run out of time and can hence not complete all the questions. It could be concluded that there is no a significant difference in test stress according to the sex of the learners. Students may lose points or marks as a result of not reading the instructions well.

According to the results obtained, the researcher adds and recommends the following:

1. Part of a teacher's job responsibility is to learn about assessment and how their students are to be assessed. Students should also be proactive where assessment is concerned. They should find out about their test schedule early and plan accordingly.

2. Preparation for test requires knowing how many and what types of tests will be administered, when they will take place, and the criteria that will be used to assess their performance. This will help them reduce their test stress.

3. Teachers need to encourage students to plan ahead, scheduling review periods well in advance, keeping them short and doing them often. If students make a semester study plan and follow it, preparing for exams should really be a matter of reviewing materials.
4. Another way that teachers can help empower students in test-taking skills is to help them form study groups. One of the major advantages of study groups is that members share academic goal and provide support and encouragement for one another. When forming study groups, it is recommended that 5-6 dedicated students get together initially to discuss common goals and procedures, (Coombe, C. and N. Hubley, 1998). The material to be reviewed should be decided upon in advance so that group members can come prepared.

5. Teachers can work with their students to create review tools such as outlines, flashcards and summaries for use in their out-of-class study sessions. This help students organize and remember information as well as condense material to a manageable size. A useful tool is the study checklist, a list of everything students need to know about the exam. As students begin reviewing, they can cross off items they have covered as they review them. An added advantage is that teachers can use this document as a reminder of the materials they need to include on a test. Thus, it is recommended that students should review the class lesson everyday so that when it comes to study, the information won’t seem so new and therefore will be not as hard to master.

6. The idea of "studying" from past exams is a controversial area in test preparation. In some cultures, students see this as an opportunity to memorize past exam content for use on later exams. Some teachers are not in favour of this because many want to reuse exams verbatim year after year. However, if teachers are doing their jobs, past exams are revised and improved upon after administration, so this practice tests, students will have an idea of the tasks/activities that they are likely to encounter on the actual exam. They will also know point allocation for each section. This information can help them plan their study time wisely. An additional advantage of this practice is that by becoming familiar with what the test 'look like', stress surrounding the test will decrease. Providing students with sample questions from past exam is beneficial to students.

7. Teachers need to be proactive in certain areas as to better prepare their students for tests. A combination of content knowledge plus the use of appropriate test-taking skills is effective combination for successful test taking.

8. All students can benefit from test-taking strategies, and this is especially true for low ability students. Examples of these strategies are reading the instructions of the test carefully, surveying all questions before responding, managing time effectively, solving easy questions first, checking and reviewing answers, guessing strategies, underlying key words or concepts in questions and eliminating wrong options (Dodeen and Abdelmabood, 2005). However, this does not mean that these strategies can replace knowledge of the materials or the preparation for the test, but it rather means that having such strategies or skills helps students maximize their scores to the limit allowed by the level of their knowledge and preparation for the test. In fact, one of the most important test-taking strategies is to know how to study and prepare well for the test. Test strategies help students increase their scores on tests through effective use of their time, effort, and test
condition. Using test-taking strategies and skills reduces test stress and improves students’ attitudes toward tests, which result in increased scores.

The results of this study have implications for teachers and educators to help them better understand the importance of test-taking strategies. In addition, teacher preparation programmes should pay more attention to the variety of instructional approaches that pre-service teachers can use to enhance student testing skills, as well as to reduce their stress in the process of assessment.

REFERENCES


