THE USE OF COMMUNICATION TECHNIQUE IN THE TREATMENT AND REDUCTION OF TEST-ANXIETY AMONG STUDENTS OF ENGLISH

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KEYWORDS:

anxiety,

communication,

campuses,

dynamics,

debilitating.

ABSTRACT

Test anxiety is everywhere o*n college campuses and negatively affects academic progress as well as overall mental and physical health of the victims. Some students develop test anxiety due to poor study skills while others experience debilitating anxiety despite adequate preparation. This study investigated the effectiveness of communication technique in the treatment and reduction of test anxiety among students. In this work, Discussion During Test procedure was designed to address the heterogeneous nature of test anxiety in students. Communication technique management is in the context of supportive group environment such that students learn the technique to manage their test anxiety while realizing that they are not alone in their struggle. At the end, recommendations are made with this issue of test anxiety with the view to reducing it to a minimal level.*

Introduction

Every attempt made, up to this moment, in majority of the Nigerian schools has been aimed at helping students score high marks in the public exams held in SS3 West African Senior School Certificate Exams (WASSCE) and National Examination Council (NECO). These two examination bodies are crucial for students because the marks they score determine their future path of education. One of the guaranteed ways of getting high marks is through rote-learning because the outdated, rigid and narrow testing methods encouraged such practices. Regrettably, such methods keep schools away from any relevant innovations. In addition, school authorities pressurize teachers to train students to memorize than practice communication skills to better their scoring chances because these marks are used by the school authorities as advertisements to lure prospective students at the time of admission.

The concern for high marks, as we know, has engulfed all the stakeholders alike; and this very concern eats into the development and happiness of the students who are at the receiving end. The over dependence on marks leads the anxious students to adopt desperate measures sometimes even to maneuver unethical ways such as copying from the neighbours and from the "hidden" notes. This act of desperation is a manifestation of anxiety. Anxiety therefore refers to affective factors that influence the way students learn a second language in classroom. Diana, E. (2010) defines it as a combination of self-perception, beliefs, feelings and behaviours that the students form in their minds regarding the language learning process. Studies suggest that language anxiety is the "best" single correlate of achievement".

Test-anxiety is a negative emotional reaction expressed by some students towards evaluative academic tasks, especially tests or examinations. Such students usually perceive the evaluative tasks as threatening. Test anxiety manifests in three component parts, namely, the cognitive, emotional and psychological symptoms. According to Nwankwo (1994).

> *The cognitive symptoms include pre-occupation during test taking moments with task-irrelevant thoughts about the test, wishful thoughts of superlative performance in the test regardless of the victim's intellectual capacity… Remarkable about the cognitive symptoms is the short interval of brain-block during which all prepared facts or answers to the questions go into momentary obscurity. The emotional symptoms manifest in form of fear, apprehension, irrational excitement and tension for the test…. The psychological symptoms are marked by trembling, increased heart-beat, gastric upset and heat in the body which gives rise to sweating. The cognitive, emotional and psychological symptoms do not occur separately one after another,*

but simultaneously during the test anxiety crisis.

The existence of test anxiety among students at all levels of education is widespread. Amalu, M.N. (2017) as well as Cherry, K. (2012) report that test anxiety existed at low, moderate and high levels among the samples they studied. The existence of test anxiety among Nigerian students was reported by Juhyun, L. (1999) while Nwankwo (1994) established its existence among Nigerian students at varying levels of low, moderate and high. Test anxiety is a scourge for students generally. It has been found out to significantly interfere adversely with students' performance academically.

For students to function efficiently during class tests, the researcher believes that test anxiety should be the first to be disposed of. It is a common place among teachers that students who study hard need have no fear of tests, but the fact of good students failing in tests confutes this notion. On the contrary, it is another commonplace, this time among students, that studying hard only for test causes mental and intellectual confusion; they suffer from debilitating anxiety before and during tests, and often perform poorly or fail the test altogether. It is against this background that the thrust of this paper is to examine the use of communication technique in the treatment and reduction of Test-Anxiety among students of English

This study investigated the effectiveness of communication technique in the treatment and reduction of test anxiety among students. In this work, Discussion During Test procedure was designed to address the heterogeneous nature of test anxiety in students. Communication technique management is taught in the context of supportive group environment such that students learn the technique to manage their test anxiety while realizing that they are not alone in their struggles.

For this work, the use of communication techniques in the treatment and reduction of test-anxiety, the subjects were trained on how to apply discussion during test (DDT). The students were told of the discussion during test procedure and were given instructions as to how to proceed during these tests:

i. They may discuss problematic textual phrases or passages with any other student in the class.
ii. They must whisper, so as to disturb their neighbours. This provides an excellent abrogator of test anxiety, as it is done positively and not fugitively, so there is no anxiety about being find out.
iii. They must, individually, answer questions in their own words in English to show comprehension both of the question and of the textual passage.

In this way, students are able to benefit both from the exchange of ideas when discussing a relevant passage and from writing their answers each in his own way. They are warned not to copy from each other because this might entail the loss of all credits for both the copycat and his victim.

The researcher would like to point out that once in the course of this study has there been any transgression in copying during tests. This is a most striking and unexpected finding which strengthen the hypothesis that test anxiety and test stresses are not only the results of fear of the unknown, but also foster cheating during tests.

In addition to the constructive effect of discussion during test on the thinking process, the fore-knowledge of discussion teamwork during tests eliminates, nearly entirely, test anxiety. The students quickly learn, as well, that if they do not study the assigned article at home in advance or read the test carefully during the test, they will not be able to discuss difficult or critical points during the test, to their own advantage. Thus, they cannot shirk the preparation for the test; they must do it because of the team discussion, and not for fear of the test or tester.

The opportunity to exhibit erudition (or knowledge) before their peers is a greater stimulator to studying than the "automatic" approval of the teacher. Team discussions also enhance the intelligence of the studious class member in the eyes of his group and strengthen his self-confident – the first stage in eliminating test anxiety. They are also a prompter par excellence to intensive reading and deeper understanding.

The use of communication technique in the treatment and reduction of Test-Anxiety among students of English

The idea that discussion during test will not only cancel anxiety but will also better enable the students to imbibe information has been suggested before but not in connection with testing. Johnson (1956) says: "anything that one wants to learn is learned best if learned in a functional state; as though the exchange of ideas to reinforce or cancel information".

It is not enough for the continual improvement of the intellect and intelligence to absorb the intake of ideas and information; one must learn how to express and communicate them to others as well. Michael, W. (2009) holds that the thinking process, though commendable, is not complete until the solution of any problem has become communicable".

Consequently, discussion as a vehicle for the exchange of ideas is a problem-solving activity.

I. It makes for better understanding.
II. It stimulates intellectual growth.
III. It satisfies the desire for free expression of ideas, whether it is done in groups, between individuals, openly in class, or in whisper during tests. Of course, it is taken for granted that any intellectual discussion is preconditioned by preliminary preparation: the thorough (intensive) reading of a given test and the exerted effort to comprehend it.

It is interesting to note that students who are at first rely on their neighbours' exertions to help them out in problematic passages during tests or in classrooms learn very fast that their neighbours may be willingly

helpful once or twice, but will reject their frequent calls for help for two main reasons: (a) the time limit of the given test, and (b) letting others copy their answers is not only time-consuming but entails a fail in both theirs and their copycats' tests.

Whatever the reasons, the advantages are obvious, even for the teachers. He does not have to keep careful vigil over who copies or not, because the students are self-controlled. They do not raise their voices above a whisper, else they will be called to order by their neighbours; neither do the lazy students attempt to copy more than once, if ever, because not only will they be confused and rejected by their fellow students, but their tests will be cancelled. In preparation for these discussions during tests (and discussion in class) the students undergo, from the first lesson, a kind of factual training. Several topics, in certain order, are both taught and exercised in class:

a. Parts of speech, for the practice of dictionary work and sentence structure.
b. The importance of taking notes.
c. Final questions to ask oneself on given articles.

The importance of these three topics is as follows:

Parts of speech are important for basic knowledge of sentence structure. A discussion of the value of note-taking should be followed by either precise writings or outlinings.

1. Students learn to discriminate between the relevant and irrelevantly trivial - the more and less important – for the purpose of comprehension.
2. Students should pay attention to ideas and meanings conveyed in the coherent text.
3. The process of rephrasing or paragraphing is a test of the students' comprehension of the test; therefore, it is best to couch notes in one's own words.
4. The students learn to select, evaluating constantly:
   a. Ideas that are more important than others.
   b. Ideas that are supported by evidence, and that are not biased or opinionatedly preconceived.

The final questions are constructive both for self-testing and for discussion in class before testing; the answers should be relevant and not digressive, so that the students can focus on more detailed information:

1. What is the subject discussed?
2. What is the purpose or function of the article?
3. Has the purpose or function been achieved or accomplished?
4. Record for future reference, facts and ideas relevant to the subject of the article.
5. Jot down significant observations selectively.

The researcher agrees with Johnson (1956), who says on the whole, the acquiring of knowledge through textbook, assignment

and other types of directed study is a smaller challenge than the sharing of knowledge through class recitation, conversation and discussion, and other types of communication, because in the later you have a dual responsibility not only to know, but to say, not only to say, but to make yourself understood".

The question is whether discussion during test contributes to the improved understanding of an academic article. If the majority of students in the class have profited from discussion during tests, namely, have learned (a) how to approach an academic text and (b) how to work on it to deepen their comprehension of it, the goal of better, or improved, text comprehension has been achieved. Discussion, in class or during test-time, also helps to correct erroneous conclusions on the part of the discussants.

Conclusion

It is the purpose of Discussion During Tests to abolish intellectually detrimental states of stress and thus enhance comprehension skills, particularly the students' ability to infer and to connect textual sequences.

To function efficiently, the students must work in an atmosphere freed of mental disruptions, especially fear of failure and/or fear of the unknown, namely, the test questions. Most intellectuals love solving riddles-answers questions – if those questions do not determine their future, as the case of academic students whose whole future may depend on their answers to test questions.

Avoid unhealthy food and nourish your body and brain with healthy food, not just the day of the exam but always. Eat a nutritious, sustaining breakfast on test day, avoiding high sugar foods that can cause a sugar crash. If caffeine causes jitteriness, consider avoiding the coffee or energy drink before a test. Get enough sleep regularly, not just the night before. Sleep is directly related to academic performance and can sooth anxiety. An adequate amount will help you operate at 100 percent on the test day. Always go for a walk. Everyone knows that vigorous exercises intended to increase oxygen intake has myriad benefits, including clearing the mind and decrease stress levels. Engage yourself in relaxation techniques. Try deep breathing, tensing and relaxing different muscle groups, mindfulness work, meditation, visualization and positive self-talk.

Get yourself adequately prepared for the test. It may seem obvious, but study the lessons, review challenging concepts, know your material. This is an easy way to boost your confidence. Develop good study habits. Many schools offer study-skill classes, tutors and other resources. Start studying at least a week before the test to avoid last-minute cramming. The creation of study groups and support groups can make a big difference in confidence and ability remember. Cognitive behavioural therapy is helpful for test anxiety, and doesn't have to be a long-term thing. The goal is to see the anxiety as a false alarm and uncomfortable but not dangerous.

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