



# EFL Test Anxiety: Sources and Supervisions

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**Abstract:** Test anxiety is one of the assessment-related emotions. It refers to the individual differences to the extent to which assessments are appraised as threatening multidimensional constructs (Putwain and Daniels, 2010). Philips *et al.* (1972) describe two factors called *Distal Antecedents* and *Proximal Antecedents* displaying development of test anxiety. *Distal Antecedents* include organismic and environmental factors such as specific patterns of the parent-child relationship, pre-school and early school experiences, and cumulative academic failure experiences which contribute more indirectly to anxiety reactions as responses to evaluate conditions. On the other hand, *Proximal Antecedents* are immediately and directly responsible for anxiety reactions in evaluative test atmosphere or a difficult and very important exam. Zeinder (1998) states that distal factors are to shape test anxiety, whereas proximal factors are believed to impact on test anxiety. Extensive studies reveal that foreign language testing is more 'anxiety-provoking' than other tests. This article attempts to explore the perceived test-anxiety level which might be influenced by the level of instruction, gender, academic achievement and the nature of course work of the students of an EFL Program at a university in Bangladesh. Besides, this study investigates the traits, sources and effects of their foreign language test anxiety. Data gathered from the sample groups using a test anxiety scale and survey questions were analyzed both statistically and descriptively. Finally, following a discussion based on the existing findings, it has been recommended that the teachers' awareness of the causes and impacts of anxiety factors may have a positive effect on the process and outcome of testing English as a Foreign Language.

**Keywords:** Anxiety, test anxiety, EFL, learners, performance.

## 1. Introduction

In a document of the American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Language Standards, it is asserted that stress should be on 'communication, cultures, connections, comparisons and communities' instead of primarily on 'aesthetic and literary values' in the current trend of foreign language teaching (Hadley, 2001). The need of improving students' awareness of their own and others' languages and cultures as well as their meta-linguistic and meta-cultural analytic skills is also expressed. At the same time, assessment of the Second Language (L2) knowledge is also thought to be more integrative and direct in some ways. Consequently, both formative and summative evaluations have been greatly emphasized than ever before. And obviously, tests and examinations have been gaining more attention as reliable means of summative evaluation and practical tools for measuring the effectiveness of instruction in any L2 teaching and learning contexts. But testing is said to be more than a liability. Linguists often claim that since language tests are one of the main means of inferring an individual's L2 learning ability and of assisting decision-making about an individual's performance, research on test validation is needed to account for the possible factors affecting language test performance (Phakiti, 2006). However, despite being a powerful instrument of evaluating the success of language learning and teaching abilities and strategies, tests may be questioned in many ways.

To begin with, some language factors like different linguistic backgrounds, varying levels of proficiency in English, varying levels of proficiency in the native language, varying degrees of schooling in native language, varying degrees of formal schooling in English, varying degrees of exposure to standardized testing and varying degrees of acculturation to the target language mainstream are some of the factors affecting test validity and reliability. In addition, Jarvis and Pavlenko (2002) outline a taxonomy of



phonological, orthographical, lexical, semantic, discursive, pragmatic, sociolinguistic and conceptual transfer of linguistic rules from L1 to L2 that any L2 learner more or less goes through while performing in the target language. Odlin (1993) reports, for example, cross-linguistic influences like 'negative transfer' are used by the learners consciously and unconsciously in different ways. These predominantly lead to producing erroneous or incomprehensible sentences in the target language. Moreover, besides teachers' perceptions of the ability of students, there is often bias in assessment relating to students' characteristics including behavior, gender, special educational needs, overall academic performance and verbal ability. These may affect the reliability of tests too.

Some well-documented cognitive and emotional factors are said to affect the learning and testing procedures. Purpura (1999) finds meta-cognitive strategies like goal-setting, planning, monitoring, self-evaluating and self-testing as having significant, direct and positive effects on cognitive processes. All three cognitive processes that include comprehending, memory and retrieval strategies directly impact the language performance. On the other hand, the affective factors mainly include empathy, self-esteem, inhibition, attitudes and anxiety (Brown, 2007). Despite its relations to other factors, anxiety has been found to be the dominant one as it mostly interferes with learning and performing strategies. Zare and Riasati (2012) note that the less anxious learners perceive themselves, the more capable of learning and performing successfully they become. Likewise, Onwuegbuzie *et al.* (2001) find a significant relationship exists between motivation and study habits, where achievement motivation might be the mediating factor of test anxiety. Furthermore, individuals at risk for trait anxiety have impaired fear inhibition at the cognitive level (Kindt, 2014). So, one of the known challenges for the learners in L2 learning contexts comes from their affective variables that involve anxiety (Wu, 2010).

Examination stress and test anxiety are deemed as 'pervasive' problems in any learning context. It has been observed that innumerable learners 'underperform because of heightened test anxiety'. The issue of anxiety in L2 learning has extensively been recognized for its considerable impact on the academic ability and performance of learners. This is particularly so in the 'various socio-cultural contexts in which they are required to express themselves in a language of which they have little command' (Ohata, 2005, p. 1). So, test anxiety has been a 'widely studied personality variable, partly because it provides a measure of the personal salience of threatening situations in which people are evaluated' (Sarason, 1984, p. 929-930). According to Spielberger and Vagg (1995), test has come out as one of the most compelling anxiety-evoking stimuli and thus it has turned into a serious problem; since, findings reveal that 'academic failure has been more among high-anxiety students than low-anxiety counterparts'. In the end, many of the high anxiety students have dropped out of college.

In any EFL contexts like Bangladesh where test is the main instrument of comprehensive assessments and the classes are usually large in size, teachers often blame the loads of routine tasks for their lack of awareness of the existence of test anxiety among the learners. They also explain that the limited time and limited energy allow them to do too little to check for test anxiety 'despite knowing of the condition', as it is not part of the syllabus to be checked. Moreover, particularly because of the 'Foreign Language' status of the English language, as well as, the varying degrees of its perceived importance and the inadequate teaching curriculum and policies implemented all over the country, the test anxiety of the Bangladeshi learners remains to be unfortunately very high. So, 'it is about time that the negative influence of test anxiety is treated with care' and teachers attempt to 'educate the students on the coping strategies to tackle test anxiety' (Joy, 2013, p. 6).

## **2. Anxiety vs. foreign language test anxiety**

As a 'personality trait', anxiety has been referred to as one's 'subjective feeling of tension', 'state of apprehension', 'nervousness', 'worry', and a 'vague fear' which are 'associated with an arousal of the automatic nervous system' and 'object' by Spielberger (1983, p. 15). Aydin *et al.* (2006, p. 146) call it 'an



uncomfortable emotional state' that involves sense of risk, powerlessness and feeling tension while preparing for 'an expected danger'. May (1977, p. 205) refers to it as 'an emotional response' to 'a threat to some value' about own existence 'as a personality'. Three distinctive classes of anxiety have so long been recognized. *Trait anxiety*, 'a more permanent predisposition to be anxious', refers to individuals' propensity and is viewed as 'an aspect of personality'. *State anxiety* is called a state of apprehension experienced at a specific moment while responding to a 'definite' situation. Therefore, this is treated as a 'type of transient anxiety brought on by situations involving threat'. *Situation specific anxiety* refers to the state of individual being anxious in a particular time and situation.

As language anxiety has been found to be closely associated with particularly attempting to 'learn an L2 and communicate in it', foreign language anxiety is called a situation-specific anxiety. Horwitz *et al.* (1986, p. 128) disagree that foreign language anxiety is a transferred form of fears aroused in the situations involving communication as well as test and negative evaluations. Instead, they call it a 'distinct complex of self-perceptions, beliefs, feelings and behaviors related to classroom language learning originated from the uniqueness of language learning process'. *Communication apprehension* arises in a state of 'shyness' because of low proficiency with better thoughts and ideas while communicating in a real-life situation. *Fear of negative evaluation* originates in any social or public communication because of being less confident of making positive impression and fretful to be negatively evaluated. This results in avoidance of 'performance', 'evaluation' and 'evaluative situation'.

*Test anxiety* being a type of performance anxiety means the 'fear of poor performance on tests'. It is a conscious or unconscious apprehension of failure in an academic evaluation situation. Even the well prepared and intelligent students often make mistakes because of this type of anxiety. Despite being one of the components of language anxiety, EFL test anxiety is more specific to test-taking and more concrete than the feeling of language learning anxiety in general. Goonan (2003, p. 158) defines test anxiety as a different and precise form of 'anxiety' which involves psychological disorder with huge amount of 'worry and fear about negative evaluation during or in anticipation of performance of evaluative situations'. McDonald (2001) calls it more complicated than the mere suggestion of its presence or absence as it leads to various individual responses. Test anxious learners are apt to react with threat perception, abridged feelings of self-efficiency, self-derogatory conditions, anticipatory failure attributions and more intense emotional reactions and arousal. Liebert and Morris (1967) consider test anxiety as an element of worry and emotionality. Worry refers to the cognitive side of anxiety (preoccupations, concerns) while emotionality refers largely to a person's awareness of bodily arousal and tension. A large body of research such as Sarason (1984) and Wine (1982) recognizes test-anxiety as a two dimensional construct having a *cognitive* and an *emotional* component. Sarason (1984) defines test anxiety as a complex state that includes cognitive, emotional, behavioural and bodily reactions. Wine (1982) suggests that test anxiety could be re-conceptualized primarily in terms of cognitive and mental processes triggered in evaluation settings. Wren and Benson's (2004) three factors model of test anxiety consists of one cognitive component 'thoughts' (worrisome and test-irrelevant thoughts), one behavioural component 'off-task behaviors' (inattentive/distracted behaviours) and one affective-physiological component 'autonomic reactions' (physiological arousal and somatic signs of anxiety). Whitaker Sena *et al.*, (2007) combine four dimensions of the complex construct of test anxiety. *Physical hyper arousal* related to *emotionality* produces physical symptoms like sweaty palms, increased heartbeat, shallow or rapid breathing when an individual prepares for and takes a test. *Worry* refers to negative self-talk and negative cognition that an individual experiences in relation to examinations. *Cognitive obstruction* is viewed as the degree to which test anxiety disrupts the ability of an individual to organize his or her thoughts or to concentrate on the task at hand. *Social humiliations* refer to cognitions related to fear or worry that others will decide or disparage one's performance on a test.



### 3. How Does Test Anxiety Affect Performance?

The effect of test anxiety is that it somehow hinders the learners' ability to show what they actually know. It is particularly observed when the teachers' perception about the learners' ability does not reflect in their test performances. Two models on cognitive test anxiety answer the question. '*Interference*' model infers that high level of test anxiety might block one's attention and inhibit the ability to recall learned information by dividing learners' cognitive power between focusing on the task and attention to task irrelevant thoughts. Sarason's (1984) subjects report 'recent past events', 'irrelevant bits of information' and 'things unrelated to the material being used in the test' as such task irrelevant thoughts. Sarason calls these as 'subset of the initial worry component'. Test-anxious students have reduced information processing capacity, less power to recall and limited ability to be engaged in higher order thinking for task solution. Another '*skill-deficit*' model by Hill and Wigfield (1984) explains effects of high test anxiety on 'study skills' and 'test-taking deficits'. Highly test-anxious students face difficulty in learning, storing, organizing material etc. They lack sufficient preparation as often deal with avoidance and miss understated indications about important things due to distracted attention. Both of these lead to poor performance. Their test-taking deficits initiate from their perception about insufficient preparation due to poor study skills. Finally, they do badly in tests as there is little learned information to recall (Breedlove *et al.*, 2005). Horwitz (1986) finds that even superior students being excessively concerned about performance might be so anxious that they attempt to compensate by studying even harder (over studying) because their compulsive efforts do not lead to their intended performance.

Test anxiety might have a more complex effect on test performance. Scovel (1978) explains two distinctive features. *Facilitating anxiety*, according to him, stimulates the learners to make extra efforts to manage anxiety and prompts to fight the difficulty of new tasks. Horwitz *et al.* (1986) suggest that this may occur in fairly simple tasks only. *Debilitating anxiety* impairs one's learning outcome, undermines the needed self-confidence and makes learners 'fleeing' the learning tasks in order to avoid anxiety. Test anxiety commonly reflects the debilitating experience of anxiety that makes the learners 'thinking passively and avoiding failure and difficulties' during the preparation for a test or during the test itself. Facilitating anxiety can stimulate the FL learners to act in response rapidly and efficiently, although debilitating anxiety might foster poor responses and restrain responses.

Test anxiety has widely been investigated regarding its correlation to L2 learners' test performance as well as to the way it affects their performance. A growing body of research on test anxiety has studied the factors responsible for it. For instance, Young (1991) and Horwitz and Young (1991) have identified test validity as one of the most significant factors to produce test anxiety. They state, students are found to be anxious if a test involves content not taught in the class. The tests characterized by the lack of face validity lead to higher anxiety and a negative attitude toward instructions. Young (1991) also reports that learners felt anxious when they found types of questions with which they had no experience. Young (1999) points out that learners' perceptions of test validity, time limits, test formats, test techniques, test length, clarity of test instructions and test environment are the aspects that manipulate their response to language tests. Ohata (2005) identifies two sources of test anxiety that involve fear of getting bad grades and time limits. Most of the participants of his study with five Japanese college students in the United States said that they feared taking tests because test-taking situations would make them fearful about the negative consequences of getting bad grades. Sometimes they also felt pressured to think that they had to organize their ideas in a short period of time. Bachman and Palmer (1996) found that inadequate test-taker qualities such as topical knowledge, language knowledge, personal trait, and strategic competence may cause test anxiety. Additionally, learners' capacity, task difficulty and lack of preparation for a test may also be attributed to test anxiety. Rotenberg (2002) showed that language proficiency and language background influence students' test anxiety. 'Lower study skills' have been indicated as the best predictor of test anxiety by Rasor and Rasor (1998) whereas Horwitz (2001) suggested, insufficient language learning is a cause rather than a result of test anxiety. Lee (1988) and Bushnell (1978) concluded a relationship between the level of test anxiety and



the situational variables such as settings, type of exam halls, and sitting arrangements. Besides, Aydin (2009) stated that researchers like Shohamy (1982), Lynne (1984) and Oh (1992) had found different test techniques such as oral interview, cloze tests, think aloud procedures to produce increased test anxiety and reactions among the students. The very thought of teachers being strict on assessment of answer scripts poses anxiety problems (Horwitz and Young, 1991). Further, Aydin *et al.* (2006) mentioned low proficiency level, negative attitudes of learners and teachers, bad experiences on test, time limits, difficulty of course contents, test invalidity and parental expectations to be the factors responsible for arousing test anxiety. Putwain (2007) explained that gender, ethnic and socio-economic backgrounds are some significant variables that affect the level of test anxiety. Finally, Salend (2011) listed some other potential triggers of test anxiety. These include learned helplessness of the learners, unrealistic expectations, peer comparisons, low self-esteem and confidence level, negative attribution and criticism, teacher and school related pressure, highly competitive classrooms, high-stake testing and grading, distracting testing environment, poorly constructed or timed tests.

#### 4. Purpose of the Study

English is one of the foreign languages taught in Bangladesh. Yet, it is not the second language of the country. It is extensively used in various private and public educational institutions. Hence, there is a very large EFL teaching and learning context in the country where English is widely taught in primary, secondary and higher education as well as at private training centers. Almost all the public and private universities integrate non-major English Language courses in their curriculum. Most of the universities introduce English as a major subject of study at undergraduate and graduate levels too. As there is a very frustrating rate of successful teaching and learning, along with poor performance records of the learners, more attempts should be made to ascertain the existing variables which affect the teaching and learning process of English. In addition, the affective factors such as language anxiety and test anxiety, if remain unnoticed and unaddressed, may hinder learners' expected performance and achievement in tests and restrain their motivation for further learning.

The relationship between anxiety and learning is naturally moderated by the learners' stage of development and by situation-specific learning experiences (McIntyre and Gardner, 1991). Anxiety suffered by the learners of each stage, therefore, should be premeditated and examined in each particular foreign language learning context in the country, so that it might be understood whether learners' poor performance is the cause or result of test anxiety. Skehan (1989) concluded that learners usually suffer from very little state anxiety, which has 'no impact' at the 'beginner' level, while learners at the 'post-beginner' level develop situation-specific anxiety. According to him, situation-specific anxiety causes nervousness and produces poor performance when learners experience bad learning and, thus, grow negative expectations. That is, poor performance and bad learning experience at the 'post-beginner' level lead to create increased anxiety which elicits continued poor performance.

Existing insufficient research, personal experience and observation encouraged the author to look into the apparent level of test anxiety among students of the undergraduate level. These learners, who have almost twelve years of experience in learning English as a foreign language, are taking English as major and minor courses and are classified as the group of learners suffering from increased test anxiety.

#### 5. Method

##### 5.1 Research Questions

This study attempted to answer the following research questions:

- What is the level of test anxiety among the university students of Bangladesh as EFL learners?
- Do gender, level of instruction, score and course influence their anxiety level?
- What are the reasons provoking test anxiety?



- What is the anxiety that they suffer from?
- How does test anxiety affect the learners?
- What could be done to manage test anxiety?

### 5.2 Participants

The respondents in this research were 100 students of Jagannath University. 75 of them were chosen from the department of English in the Faculty of Arts and 25 participants were from the department of Zoology in the Faculty of Science. 60 were male and 40 were female. The group of English major learners consisted of twenty five *first year second semester*, twenty five *second year first semester* and twenty five *third year first semester* students. All of them had the same English learning background, since they had passed H.S.C. in the same academic year. None of them had any study gap or longer learning history than the other. 97 TAS scales and survey questionnaires only were analysed, since 3 out of the 100 participants did not provide their accurate background information and so were rejected.

Sex	Student Number
Female	42
Male	55
Course	
Major	72
Minor	25
Level	
First	50
Second	23
Third	24
Score	
Good	9
Bad	16

### 5.3 Instruments

The data on test anxiety were gathered using a tool with three sections which consisted of: (1) a background study, (2) a slightly modified version of Sarason's (1984) Test Anxiety Scale (used by Aydin *et al.*, 2006), and (3) survey questions. The TAS is based on the theory and evidence that test anxiety is composed of test-relevant and test-irrelevant thinking (Burguen *et al.*, 2011). TAS questionnaire which had been adapted from Aydin *et al.* (2006) and Burguen *et al.* (2011) was used. This study included the modification of TAS slightly in order to fit with the context of Bangladesh and the purpose of the study so that there would be no misconception among the learners. Information on the learners' gender, level of learning, years of passing H.S.C. and academic scores were collected in a background questionnaire. The Test Anxiety Scale in Likert type, (always = 5, usually = 4, sometimes = 3, rarely = 2, never = 1) containing 22 multiple choice questions aimed at measuring the degree of test anxiety perceived by the learners. The third section called the 'survey' contained four questions on the reasons that provoke test anxiety; traits of their test anxiety; effects of test anxiety and the ways test anxiety could be managed.

### 5.4 Procedure

The questionnaire and the test anxiety scale were administered at the mid of the semester with first and second year students and with the third year students at the end of their course. In the beginning, the background questionnaire on age, gender, academic scores etc. and test anxiety scale was administered. A GPA less than 3.2 out of 4.0 was considered as representative of poor grades while good grades were those above this range. The data were analyzed statistically and separately for the variables of gender, level of instruction, type of courses and academic achievement. After a week, having the level of anxiety observed,



the survey questionnaires were given to the participants in different class hours. They answered them after being properly instructed and ensured by the author that their participation was neither a part of their academic activities nor will it be assessed in any way as a part of their performance.

### 5.5 Data Analysis

The data analysis procedure had two stages. At first, the reliability coefficient of TAS was found in Alpha (Cronbach) model. The value of the Cronbach alpha ( $\alpha$ ) was 0.98 which indicated a high degree of consistency. The mean scores, standard deviations and standard error means were found to assess the test anxiety level and the homogeneity of the sample group. Then, the data were analyzed with the aid of the R-statistical software and interpreted using descriptive and inferential statistics. T-test was computed to detect the correlations between the dependent variable, TAS results and the subject variables such as gender, level of instruction, grade and achievement scores. The correlation coefficients and significance levels (0.05) between the dependent and subject variables were also presented. Finally, the results of the survey questionnaire were analyzed manually and descriptively.

## 6. Analysis of Findings

The findings showed that the respondents generally suffer from English Language test anxiety. The range of the mean was 3.5 to 4.5. Table 1 shows the level of test anxiety among the EFL learners. Overall, the EFL learners in Bangladesh worry while taking a test and often think that other students perform better. They feel worried while studying for a test and get upset when they come to know that they will take a test. They believe sometimes that tests affect their performance negatively, as they would perform better otherwise and forget what they know. Besides, they usually do not feel confident and relaxed before or after the test. After tests, the learners rather often feel that they could have done better.

As shown in Table 2, the female learners majoring in English were found to be slightly more anxious than the male learners ( $p = 0.08$ ); although, statistically there was no significant difference between the levels of anxiety of the female English-minor learners and the male counterparts ( $p = 0.16$ ). However, the English majors were found to be more worried while taking a test ( $p = 0.00$ ) and about other students' performance ( $p = 0.01$ ). They also thought of more unrelated things ( $p = 0.01$ ), felt more worried while studying for a test ( $p = 0.03$ ) and got more confused about studying ( $p = 0.03$ ) than the female learners. On the other hand, although the difference between female and male English-minor learners did not appear significant at a confidence level of 0.05, female learners were found to become more anxious after the test and they thought they could do better ( $p = 0.06$ ). On the other hand, male learners were found to be more anxious in items 2, 5, 7, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15, 16, 17, 18, 20, 22.

As shown in Table 3, the levels of instruction had no significant relationship with the levels of test anxiety of the learners of 1<sup>st</sup> year 2<sup>nd</sup> semester and 2<sup>nd</sup> year 1<sup>st</sup> semester ( $p = 0.26 > 0.1$ ) although the younger learners were found to be more pressurized before exam ( $p = 0.06$ ). The analysis shows that the students of 2<sup>nd</sup> year 1<sup>st</sup> semester (older) were more anxious during tests ( $p = 0.03$ ) and always thought other students are better ( $p = 0.03$ ). They felt less confident and relaxed when they learnt about the test ( $p = 0.00$ ) and were worried after the test ( $p = 0.04$ ). Their emotions usually affected their performance ( $p = 0.01$ ) and they were always worried while preparing for tests ( $p = 0.03$ ). They also worried when they were not prepared well ( $p = 0.04$ ).

The younger Turkish learners in Aydin *et al.* (2006) were found to be more anxious while taking tests and tests affected them more negatively than the older ones. Unlike Aydin's results, this study found no significant relationship between the anxiety levels of the senior learners of 3<sup>rd</sup> year 2<sup>nd</sup> semester and also 3<sup>rd</sup> year 1<sup>st</sup> semester ( $p = 0.35 > 0.1$ ). Instead, the analysis showed that the older group was more anxious in many aspects (in items 1, 2, 4, 5, 7, 9, 10, 16, 19 and 21). That is, they were not only more worried while taking a test ( $p = 0.02$ ) and about other students' performance ( $p = 0.03$ ) but also were preoccupied with unrelated thoughts ( $p = 0.00$ ) and anxious to learn about tests ( $p = 0.00$ ). Their emotions affected



performance negatively ( $p = 0.04$ ), they worried after the tests ( $p = 0.01$ ) and felt that they could do better ( $p = 0.04$ ) too. The older learners were pressured by time limits ( $p = 0.01$ ), worried when they were not well prepared ( $p = 0.03$ ), and tests affected their performance negatively ( $p = 0.04$ ).

The study also found that the nature of course work has no statistically considerable impact on the level of learners' test anxiety ( $p = 0.43 > 0.1$ ) (Shown in Table 3). The students of the department of Zoology are taught English as a non-major course and were found with more anxiety to study for an English test ( $p = 0.02$ ). They studied less when they had bad grades ( $p = 0.03$ ), they thought that they would learn more if they had no tests ( $p = 0.03$ ) and tests affected their performance negatively ( $p = 0.00$ ). In contrast, the students of the department of English were more confused while preparing for the tests ( $p = 0.05$ ), felt more pressured by time limits ( $p = 0.09$ ) and worried when they were not prepared well ( $p = 0.07$ ).

Table 4 shows the significant relationship between the academic achievements of the learners and their test anxiety levels ( $p = 0.11$ ). The lower the scores are, the higher the level of anxiety is. This is the only finding comparable to that of Aydin's study. However, the findings have been proven to be reversed in six items. In other words, the students with higher scores were found to be more worried about other students' better performance ( $p = 0.04$ ) and were busy with unrelated thoughts ( $p = 0.00$ ). They were also more bothered with tests ( $p = 0.02$ ) and unsure about success ( $p = 0.01$ ). Bad grades ( $p = 0.03$ ) and tests ( $p = 0.04$ ) affected their study.

## 7. Descriptive analysis

Descriptive analysis of the answers obtained from the survey questions depict that EFL learners' test anxiety consists of three categories. Besides mental stress, they go through some physical and neurological symptoms too. As pointed out in the survey, the physical sufferings of the youngest learners are the worst. Whiteaker Sena *et al.* (2007) suggested that elementary students are more likely to show the physical signs of test anxiety and older students are more likely to experience the behavioural and affective symptoms associated with test anxiety. Sleeplessness, severe and frequent headache, irritation, reduced appetite, faster heartbeats, trembling body, weighted head, stomach upset, breathing problem, feeling cold and thirsty, sweating, burning eyes and feeling suffocated while remembering in the exam hall are their common physical signs (*autonomic reactions*). Most frequent affective (*thoughts*) symptoms suffered by them are feeling pressured for completing preparations, feeling impatient, depressed with reduced motivation, forgetting tendency, lack of confidence, fear of tests, feeling incapable of doing the right thing, confusion, and feeling forced to take pressure than ability etc. Last, the behavioural (*off-task*) anxiety symptoms consist of dreaming of being late to the exam hall, losing spontaneity, harsh behavior or response to close ones, a growing tendency of recalling what has been learnt and desperateness. The worst nature of anxiety is that these physical and psychological reactions might turn to be the reasons behind poor performance.

For the EFL learners in Bangladesh, sources of test anxiety are found to be closely related to students' and teachers' attitudes, proficiency, parental beliefs, environmental issues, testing procedure and trait anxiety:





Title	Sources of anxiety
Learners' attitudes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• competitive outlook</li> <li>• sense of social prestige regarding success</li> <li>• fear of negative evaluation and teachers' acceptance of the answers</li> <li>• belief of certain failure</li> <li>• feeling pressured by time constraints</li> <li>• being irregular and uninterested in studying</li> <li>• undermined self-image</li> <li>• always considering others to be better</li> <li>• unwilling to take risk</li> <li>• disliking for learning language</li> <li>• being compared with others by scores</li> </ul>
Teachers' approach	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• teachers' stubborn manner in adverse testing situation</li> <li>• their unshared psychology</li> <li>• unhelpful and threatening behavior while invigilating</li> <li>• expressed frustration about learners' competency</li> <li>• using test scores for authority</li> <li>• sporadic and distant teacher-student interaction which creates chances of information gap</li> <li>• teachers' reaction against repeated questions that leave learners' question unanswered</li> <li>• teachers' being confident on students' perception about techniques and quality of test</li> <li>• their unwillingness to share own understanding about testing</li> <li>• performance expected from the learners</li> </ul>
Proficiency level	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• insufficient preparation</li> <li>• inadequate knowledge about question format and items</li> <li>• significant difference between classroom activities and question items appeared in tests</li> <li>• fossilized expressions of ideas</li> <li>• unmanaged items found due to being inattentive in the class</li> <li>• memorizing without understanding</li> <li>• previous bad grades or poor scores achieved in progressive tests</li> </ul>
Parental beliefs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• parental pressure</li> <li>• high expectation for success</li> </ul>
Environmental issues	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• tight atmosphere in exam hall</li> </ul>
Testing procedure	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Hurried test application procedures like faulty exams</li> <li>• inappropriate presentation of test</li> <li>• poorly prepared test and management</li> <li>• unrepresentative test samples</li> <li>• indirect testing and testing without face validity</li> </ul>
Trait anxiety	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• general weakness in learning English</li> </ul>

For all respondents, except a few female learners, test anxiety brings only deteriorating impacts. Highly test anxious learners report that tension affects preparation before the test, hinders performance during the test and creates pressure about success after the test. Moderately anxious learners report that anxiety is higher before tests, disappears during the test and reappears after the test. According to Tobias (1986), anxiety works as a mental block to cognitive performance at all three cognitive stages: Input, Processing and Output. That is, anxiety arousal which is associated with 'self-deprecating thoughts', 'fear of failure', or 'worry over performance procedures' may compete for cognitive resources that normal cognitive processing will demand. Since, the capacity for information processing is naturally overloaded to the extent that language performance is impaired (Eyseenck, 1979).

*Pre-test anxiety* mainly produces deficient confidence which is followed by lack of concentration in learning. Thus, the learners study less; get confused; make wrong selection of items; memorize without understanding to be prepared quickly; become occupied with irrelevant thoughts; forget learnt things; grow



wrong self-perception about ability and performance; take long time to learn something and waste time by doing anything other than study to get relief of the tension. In short, *pre-test anxiety* dispirits them to study the course content properly and utilize the cognitive ability to achieve it. Finally, it results in failure of learning the target language.

*While-test anxiety*, on the other hand, directly affects reproducing what has been learnt. It makes learners feel blank and miss important information; confuses them about right answer and induces them to choose the wrong one; creates stress in time management etc. The learners also find the interrelated answers mingled with each other; produce same syntaxes and use same words repeatedly out of anxiety. Goonan (2003) finds that learners may misread questions, experience difficulty understanding the nature of the question asked, and have trouble organizing his or her thoughts too. For oral tests, the respondents find themselves producing frequent wrong and incomplete or broken answers, although things are known. In this sense, test anxiety particularly prevents real performance and knowledge to be reflected in the test score. Cassady (2004) suggests, students with high anxiety not only have inferior content-acquisition and organization skills, they are also aware of their inabilities. Such self-awareness of an inability to prepare adequately has been proposed to activate debilitating test perceptions and behaviours such as task avoidance, perceived test threat, emotionality and learned helplessness significantly where the external evaluative pressure is salient.

*Post-test anxiety* entuses the learners to see the result; compare own performance with others; think others will do better; believe own answer wrong and insufficient; feel that they could do better in case of being not anxious etc. Nevertheless, few learners, especially females, report a little positive effect like a greater urge to study because of anxiety. Moreover, when they think that others are doing better, they work harder and thus achieve higher scores.

In answer to the question 'what could be done to manage test anxiety?', the respondents of this study put the first burden on themselves though they refer to the extended role of teachers and policy makers too. Most of them state that nothing other than studying properly and regularly can bring the confidence up. Preparation should not be taken just only before the tests as well. Taking sufficient preparation, studying and discussing in groups, talking to teachers about tests and anxiety, learning to cope with anxiety and testing own self before real examinations have been mentioned as some effective ways of managing test anxiety by the learners. The students also believe that teachers should use the best suitable and appropriate test formats which comply with their existing knowledge. Scoring should also be as objective as possible so that they can trust the procedure with all their expectations. Being aware of the use of two examiners system in the university, they have not been anxious about the reliability in scoring. But it was a major concern for Turkish learners who reported that tests should not be used for authority or punishment in Aydin's (2006) study. These learners also emphasized establishing a useful rapport between teachers and students, in order to share their problems regarding test preparation as well as enquiries about test formats, test techniques and patterns etc.

According to the respondents, a briefing by the teacher on the aims and objectives of a course, the test content as well as the relationship between the course objectives and the test format, prior to taking any test could help them to deal with anxiety. They believe, reference of the appropriate books as well as increased number of class tests, oral tests and review classes could aid them too. Besides, they think, a lengthy test should be replaced with a number of small tests because repeated tests and immediate feedbacks would minimize their anxiety. Aydin's (2006) subjects suggested a trial version of a test should be administered. Teachers' cooperative attitude and empathetic behavior during tests could improve the situation too. They proposed that teaching styles and testing policies should be effectively modified with upgraded testing environments, testing formats and course contents, though 'lack of content validity' has not been a source of their test anxiety. Methods and techniques in teaching English should also be more creative,



lively and inspiring. Testing items should be more real-life oriented and authentic too. Finally, teachers' awareness of learners' anxiety during tests has also been desired and they believe it would help the most.

## 8. Conclusions and Recommendations

This study concludes that Bangladeshi EFL learners have equally high level of test anxiety irrespective of their gender, age and type of coursework. However, their anxiety level varies according to their academic achievements. This reveals that test anxiety is more strongly correlated with test performance than with other variables. Findings of this study indicate that though levels of instruction do not significantly impact the learners' test anxiety, the younger learners are usually more pressured before the tests. But the older learners are more anxious about taking tests and about other students' performance and preparing for tests. Emotions affect their performance more than the younger learners. Researchers like McDonald (2001), Hill and Wigfield (1984) and Hambree (1988) also focus on the influence of an 'individual's history of learning' and 'age' on test anxiety and personal performance. They also suggest that test anxiety tends to increase with age because previous negative experiences might trigger 'negative emotional reactions' to failure and lower personal performance. At the same time, the male English-major learners were found to be slightly more anxious than the female learners but they were most worried while taking a test and were particularly confused about preparation. Although both the male and female English-minor learners were equally anxious, female learners were more worried after the test and about the performance. Female learners might have been able to benefit from exploiting some facilitative anxiety while preparing and appearing in the test. So, they worried more about the result after the test.

The only recognizable relationship found in this study is between the anxiety level and the score of the learners. That is, the learners with low scores were usually more anxious than those with high achievement. But in some items related to performance and preparation, the high achievers showed considerably more anxiety than the low scorers. The high achievers were more affected with bad grades and the idea of tests. Tests also bother them the most. Besides, they were worried about other students' performance and were unsure about their own success. These seem to be very closely related to their high instrumental motivation for performing better than before and than others. Though there was no relationship found between the levels of anxiety and the nature of course work, English-minor learners of the department of Zoology were found to be more anxious about the 'idea of test' which affected their performance negatively. Their anxiety might have been due to the less importance they associate with English as a minor-course of study and the least integrative motivation they have towards it.

Their EFL test anxiety was expressed through some particular physical disorders and mental agonies. Though physical disorders were more explicit than the psychological pressure, these affected the learners only during the preparation stage and were not felt throughout the test. Tryon (1980) found that 'emotionality' is unrelated to test performance and gradually lessens or disappears during and after the test. Conversely, the affective signs of test anxiety relate to negative self-image, pessimistic and unrealistic comparisons with others, giving extensive pressure on own selves, panic of collapse, feeling incompetent etc. which are potential enough to persuade test performance negatively (Morries and Liebert, 1970). Goonan (2003) asserts that 'cognitive component of test anxiety' or 'worry' are more dominant than the emotionality or physical component. Test anxiety producing factors are teachers' attitudes and behavior, learners' attitudes to success and ability, fear of negative evaluation, lack of preparation, invalidity of test, difficulty of courses, time limits and parental expectations etc. Test anxiety mainly stems from 'fear of failure' which is a type of self-evaluation (Horwitz *et al.*, 1981) and any other reasons found in this research are either closely associated or based on this basic source of test anxiety.

This study explored both the study skill and the test taking skill deficits as the effects of test anxiety as denoted by Hill and Wigfield's (1984) *skill deficit model*. Before the test, anxiety caused distraction in choosing and acquiring important points. Being pressured, students memorize without understanding and

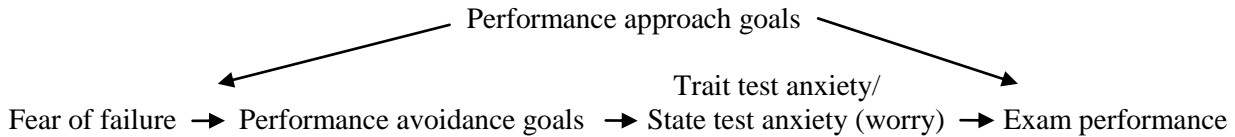


therefore, forget the lessons. Consequently, they were often at a complete loss because of insufficient preparation while taking tests. The findings also referred to the *interference model* of Benjamin *et al.* (1981), as the respondents were often preoccupied with task-irrelevant thoughts while preparing for tests and this affects processing information in examination time. High anxiety tended to split their attention between task demands and personal concerns as well as exceeded their memory capacity. As a result, they felt empty and puzzled. Birenbaum and Nasser (1994) and Cassady (2004) found such learners to be less capable of processing information necessary for complex tasks. In addition, having perceived less preparation than their working memory capacity, they could not utilize the needed cognitive load effectively while using study skills. Benjamin *et al.* (1981) concluded that well prepared students suffering from high anxiety may have retrieval blocking difficulties as well as inability to apply useful strategies. The interference is usually more in retrieval than in storage. The symptoms of while-test taking anxiety refer to the *drive theory* of Spence and Spence (1966). The theory suggests that in some situations, if the task is assumed as 'difficult', anxiety may indiscriminately strengthen both the correct and incorrect responses equally as well as may lead to increased errors. Although most of the studies deal with debilitating anxiety, the respondents in this study demonstrated 'optimal' or 'facilitating' anxiety which stimulated mainly the female learners to take the challenges and to cope with course difficulties. Scovel (1978) and McDonald (2001) suggested, a certain level of test anxiety creates positive impact by keeping the learners alert and helping to focus work on encountered task. Learners with optimal anxiety in this study reported being persuaded to be prepared for tests and to take risks with unseen items in EFL test situations.

Depending on the results and discussion of this study, some suggestions could be presented on the dos and don'ts of the students, teachers and authorities in order to dispel test anxiety. *First of all*, expertise and positive professionalism of both the teachers and the authorities should be increased so that learners could rely more on the overall test procedures and test situations. *Second*, it is crucial to 'test what is taught' (Young, 1991). Representation of course content is not enough in the case of the content not taught to the students in detail. In fact, a manifestation of accurately perceived course objectives is more important as this could generate a basic confidence among the learners. *Third*, only teachers' sincerity in reducing the information gap about the test between the testers and the addressees could be an enormous step to treat learners' test anxiety. Prior information on format, techniques, content and pattern of tests provided by the teachers to the learners must create mutual trust between them and thus state anxiety levels may decrease. *Fourth*, a very good teacher-student interaction before and after a test is absolutely required. In this way, learners may have a space to share inquiries and problems before the test, as well as, receive teachers' immediate feedback after the test and this may reduce anxiety. On the other hand, teachers could explain expected performance from the learners and this may elevate their sense of responsibility and motivation. In general, teachers should restrict themselves from demoralizing the learners and expressing frustration about their potential during tests. *Fifth*, teachers' intimacy is highly desired by the learners while taking tests. Both verbal and non-verbal (such as eye contact, positive gestures) compassionate manners instead of unnecessary strictness and noncooperation often ease the learners' feeling of being threatened. *Sixth*, some cognitive approaches such as using cumulative tests for larger units, distributing full marks into written and oral tests may help in segregating learners' sense of a huge burden. In addition, the use of short and long term project works and case-studies, in order for learners' wisdom, skills and performances to be demonstrated and evaluated, will possibly insure more benefits. It has already been detected that traditional tests often fail to demonstrate students' knowledge in marks. Learners are more positively involved- without pressure of being constantly assessed- in theses or project works which focus on content instead of on accuracy and errors. According to Tsiplakides and Keramida (2009), such works engage learners in active roles and responsibilities that can boost their confidence and reduce perceptions of low ability in target language. *Finally*, language teachers have to acknowledge and be aware of learners' fears. They should help the learners to exterminate their negative self-concept and self-perceived low academic competency as well. They could discover any positive evaluation for the highly anxious learners too. Above all, a low-stress, collaborative, pleasant and supportive classroom is always supposed to facilitate acquisition and learning of a second language, while providing 'optimal motivation' and 'minimum anxiety about errors and



performances'. So teachers should attempt creating spontaneous teaching, learning and testing environments that can prompt performance oriented approaches among the learners. According to Elliot and McGragor (1999), learners' trait test anxiety being mediated by performance avoidance goals finally influences exam performance negatively. Their proposed integration is:



They expect that performance approach goals are supposed to be unmediated by worry or anxiety. Since the respondents reported trait test anxiety to be transferred into worry about the test, performance approach goals could be a great fill for them.

According to Ergene (2003), test anxiety has been understood in terms of both 'physiological and emotional phenomenon' and treatment of it has always combined behavioural and cognitive approaches too. Hence, most interventions focus on increasing cognitive restructuring and most practical interventions focus on improving the whole picture of an individual's test taking behaviours (Goonan, 2003). Some implicational pedagogy can be recommended in order to develop ideal evaluation procedures and teaching programs which help raise the test-takers positive motivation and self-confidence along with showing optimal learning and performance in any EFL evaluative situation. In brief, teachers should specifically make sure that the strategies being used facilitate student access and performance, minimize anxiety and provide an accurate measure of students' skills and content knowledge without undermining the validity of the test results. (Roach *et al.*, 2010).

Detection:

#### *Identifying anxiety*

Test anxiety usually comes to light when there is a discrepancy between a student's perceived ability and his or her outcome on tests. Anxiety could be due to one of the factors such as learning disabilities, attention deficit, social difficulties and depression that contribute to an individual not performing to his or her ability. So, identification of anxiety as a reason for the discrepancy between ability and performance could be the first step of addressing it.

#### *Finding sources and signs*

Students who experience heightened and detrimental levels of anxiety while taking tests should be identified from the beginning. Usually the factors triggering test anxiety vary in relation to individual students, family dynamics, institutions, classrooms and teaching practices. These triggers interact to create a cycle that leads to escalating levels of test anxiety as well (Cassady, 2010). Therefore, teachers could assess the presence of the physical, behavioural, and affective warning signs of test anxiety in their students. Observing the students during tests, interviewing students and their families about their reactions to tests might be the ways to perceive the anxiety of the learners. Students can also be asked to complete surveys that rate the extent to which they experience the anxiety symptoms (Peleg, 2009). Cizek and Burg (2006) offer a summary of review of surveys for assessing test anxiety. In addition, Salend (2011, p. 60) suggests that as soon as a teacher determines which students may be experiencing test anxiety, he could use the assessments as a 'spring board to explain the condition to the students'.



Teaching practices:

#### *Utilizing facilitative anxiety*

Most of the learners feel some levels of stress or worry when preparing for and taking tests. Cizek and Burg (2006) think, moderate and appropriate levels of nervousness can foster students' motivation, memory and attention as well as enhance test performance. Some certain levels of discomfort and unpleasant feelings would keep students alert. Further, such pressure could make students take on challenges or difficult tasks that are usually avoided by others (Scovel, 1978). So, using the facilitative effect of the optimal level of anxiety is essential in L2 learning and teaching; since, this type of anxiety gives students sufficient challenges and equally makes them believe that they can handle the tasks. Hence teachers should try to approach the learners with different kinds of tasks that are slightly difficult and bring up facilitative anxiety. This might teach the learners to confront the uncertainty in tests (Chen, 2007).

#### *Ensuring optimistic learning*

Learners tend to relate their unpleasant learning experiences to anxiety and the negative effect of test anxiety could originate from students' history of learning (Gregerson and Horwitz, 2002). Besides, 'individual's past experiences and beliefs' as well as 'the amount of success versus failure' are also important to 'mold their unique reactions to test situations' (McDonald, 2005). Generally, the history of failure can result in low perception of students' ability and self-esteem when they encounter negative learning experiences. Consequently, test-anxious students anticipate failure about their test result and feel defeated easily. Moreover, punishments such as spanking or humiliation with errors in public often result in negative reactions in learners and affect teacher-student interactions. Any punishment of one person may often cause anxiety and tension in all other students. So, Chen (2007) suggests a basic understanding toward the learning history of learners, for teachers to reduce overall learning and testing anxiety.

#### *Improving study -skills*

Inadequate and inefficient studying can create and intensify the test anxiety that the learners experience. However, many researchers would agree that inadequate test preparation does not sufficiently explain the low test scores of students with test anxiety (Ball, 1995). But at least some of the test-anxious students show a pattern of poor test preparation that does not enhance their academic performance in the face of test anxiety (Birenbaum and Nasser, 1994). Teachers should encourage more than adequate preparation because a test-anxious student benefits from having the best possible grasp of the material before taking an exam. A teacher could give the learners essential tools to succeed despite test anxiety. Teaching good study skills, good study habits and raising willingness to seek extra support with difficult information could be such tools for the learners (Goonan, 2003). Lagares and Cornor (2009) suggest knowing what to study is a critical foundation for studying. So, students should be aware of the contents and types of items that are most likely to appear on tests. Providing students with study guides addressing the purpose, content and format of the test (Walker and Schmidt, 2004) might be useful. Besides, using educational games and stimulated tests to review and practice possible test content, questions and conditions (Conderman and Pedersen, 2010) could also guide the learners. Study skills may be defined as student behaviours during meaningful learning that are intended to improve the encoding, acquisition, retention and retrieval of new knowledge (Tobias, 1985). Teaching study skills mainly means to teach the learners both 'what to study' and 'how to study'. Planning and organizational skills are particularly important too, since students often show tendencies toward avoidance and self-defeating behaviours such as procrastination, not remembering or not completing assignments. Students should learn to focus on specific goals; have the necessary resources and materials available; create an outline and summary for each study session (Salend, 2009).

#### *Teaching test taking-skills*

Teaching to use effective test-taking skills could be another approach to reduce learners' anxiety during tests. These strategies can help students stay relaxed, focused and motivated to succeed on a test (Carter *et al.*, 2005). Teachers can teach them how to perform a memory dump or down-load as soon as the



test is handed to them in order to lessen the fear of forgetting important information. Walker and Schmidt (2004) recommend that listing key points, definitions, formulas, dates and names as well as jotting down memory clues are some effective strategies to promote recall. Besides, teaching students to work on easier items first to build their self-confidence, budget their time, strategically highlight essential aspects of test directions and items could improve the test performance of the anxious learners.

Testing procedures:

#### *Reassuring tests*

Salend (2011) advocates involving the students in the testing process in order to make the tests less threatening. Asking them to devise possible test questions to include on tests; allowing them to assume responsibility and control over the testing experience; and structuring tests in ways so that they have choices in responding to items could make this possible.

#### *Practicing group-tests*

Using cooperative-group testing to minimize stress related to test is often suggested by teachers. Students are allowed to work collaboratively on open-ended tasks and test items in group tests. Usually the group's product and cooperative behaviours are evaluated in such tests and an individual group member should be required to respond to questions about the group's product (Michaelsen and Sweet, 2008).

#### *Scoring Positively*

As some of the tension students experience can be related to the pressure associated with grades (Huberty, 2009), positive scoring could be a good suggestion to reduce that pressure. A variety of scoring methods to lessen anxiety, motivate students and encourage their efforts to succeed on tests (Brookhart and Nikto, 2008) could be considered. Salend (2011) explains that- when grammar, spelling and punctuation are not the elements being tested- refraining from penalizing students for errors or giving them separate grades for content and mechanics could be considered. Besides, motivation theorists often argue that judging learners only on their ability might lead those learners who are trying hard but still not doing well to give up. Survey results also indicate that parents and teachers both wish to have separate grades for ability and effort (Hill and Wigfield, 1984). Grading for effort might reduce students' 'negative motivation and undue concern about evaluation' though Deci and Ryan (1985) report that it undermines intrinsic motivation.

#### *Desensitizing tests*

Systematic desensitization and graduated exposure help reduce situation-specific anxiety and improve grades (Gonzales, 1995). Pop quizzes, practice exams under timed conditions and pressured responses are examples of ways to provide graduated exposure to an anxiety provoking situation.

#### *Applying comprehensible tests*

Salend (2009) proposes that creating accessible and student friendly tests could make the testing experience less stressful than giving surprise tests or quizzes. Tests should assess a reasonable amount of content and be regularly scheduled. Composing valid objectives when creating tests and choosing essay questions that relate to important content can make tests more user-friendly. Providing students with opportunities to take practice tests that use the same format that they will encounter on their upcoming exams could be another step to make the tests student-friendly (Conderman and Pederson, 2010). Tests with proper presentation, organization, spacing and sequencing of items are usually user-friendly and less confusing. On the other hand, tests causing confusion and distraction can make those students having organizational and attention difficulties feel more anxious before they begin (Roach *et al.*, 2010). So, presenting items in a fixed, predictable, symmetrical and numbered sequence may guide students to make a smooth transition which can help to avoid skipping test items (Acrey *et al.*, 2005). Besides, testing experience could be made more motivating and meaningful for the students by devising test items that are related to their lives and interests, as well as, appropriate for their academic ability (Savage *et al.*, 2006). Salend (2009) recommends, tests could be personalized too, if feasible and appropriate. This could be



possible by phrasing items and incorporating students' experiences. In addition, familiar or known names, popular characters and trends could be used in test items. Some other important ways suggested to create accessible tests are:

- Test questions and the directions for completing them could be presented on the same page so that learners do not need to turn back and forth. Again, limiting the number of items on a page, grouping similar question types together and surrounding test directions in text boxes might also be helpful to reduce stress (Salend, 2009).
- Salend (2009) also suggests using prompts that guide students in engaging in behaviours that help them stay focused, remain calm, and succeed on tests. Placing prompts strategically throughout the tests to remind students to pay attention, ask questions, maintain their efforts and motivations, use effective test-taking strategies, and engage in self-reinforcement could also be very useful. Finally, he suggests using texts that acknowledge students' efforts (e.g. "Way to go", "Good Luck", "Congratulations on finishing the test").
- McKinley and Stormont (2008) suggest creating test items that incorporate humor, curiosity and novelty. Likewise, Beddow *et al.* (2008) emphasize ensuring the items to be inclusive, multicultural and respectful, realistic, factually correct. The terms and referents should be universal as well.
- Accessible and user-friendly tests should be clear and have complete directions that help students understand the conditions and contexts associated with test questions. Tests directions should not contain 'vague terms' such as *frequently*, *usually* and 'irrelevant information' which may create confusion, frustration or misinterpretations among students (Brookhart and Nikto, 2008).

Dealing with evaluative pressure:

#### *Endorsing anxiety reduction strategies*

Whitaker Sena *et al.* (2007) suggest encouraging and teaching students to use anxiety reduction strategies before, during and after testing in order to lessen physical and affective symptoms with test anxiety. The following strategies could help the learners deal with situational test anxiety:

- coming to the testing environment on time rather than early;
- avoiding interactions with others that can intensify their anxiety (Salend, 2009);
- handling anxiety-producing questions and comments such as peers asking questions about what they studied;
- seeking the answers to questions (Rothman, 2004);
- engaging in self-encouraging statements;
- taking a few minutes to relax and focus on their goals and plans for success (Conderman and Pederson, 2010);
- mediating, taking a deep breath, engaging in positive self-talk and focusing on past success (Cizek and Burg, 2006);

#### *Training 'attribution'*

Test anxious students suffer most from negative thoughts and self-perceptions of low academic competence. Therefore, they often approach the testing environment with the expectation that they are unprepared or unlucky, and will fail or perform poorly (Cassady, 2010). Ultimately, they ascribe their poor performance to bad luck, teacher mistakes and lack of own ability (Rothman, 2004). So, the test anxious students should be trained with several cognitive behavioural techniques such as, challenging irrational beliefs or thoughts; replacing those with self-reinforcing statements; self-instruction and coping strategies when faced with the sensation of anxiety (Ellis and Grieger, 1977). Hong *et al.* (2007) believe, attribution training could teach the students to understand the actions that contribute to their success and to counter their negative thoughts. Through such training, students learn to believe in positive attribution that credit their successful test performance to their effort and other factors within themselves (Merlone and Moran, 2008). The primary goal of cognitive behavioural interventions is to help the students to recognize maladaptive





thoughts and replace those thoughts with realistic versions of the initial perception (Goonan, 2003). Dorland (2009) considers that introducing a range of learning activities may help students understand how attributions and effort affect their test performance. Such activities should enable them to interpret poor performance as a signal of the need to work harder. They could also be able to identify ways of improving, acknowledge and analyse successful outcomes, identify behaviours that need to be continued and enhanced, discuss and learn from their mistakes etc. Joseph and Konrad (2009) give emphasis to teachers' feedback on the ability of learners and informational feedback for incorrect answers.

#### *Encouraging relaxation techniques*

As test anxiety has physiological correlations, test anxious individuals may engage in visualization, progressive muscle relaxation or other relaxation techniques to gain greater regulation over the physiological sensations accompanying anxiety. The test anxious learners, even with adequate preparation, are likely to experience familiar physiological sensations. So, it should be emphasized that some degree of anxiety is normal and perhaps it is slightly helpful in a testing situation to help them to relax. Often the learners with test anxiety do not adequately attend to their physiological needs. Sometimes, they reduce their usual amount of sleep which only exacerbates an already difficult situation. Sleep allows the mind to recharge and prepare for analysis and integration of more information and strategies (Goonan, 2003).

#### *Determining realistic goals*

Students often have unrealistically high expectations of their performance. Sometimes, it is the parents who tend to develop unrealistic expectations of their children's performance. They may also negatively react to failure (McDonald, 2001). Such situations are surely anxiety provoking. So, developing more realistic expectations would be desirable to encounter this issue. Teachers could build up a communication platform with parents or students towards more realistic goal-setting that may help to alleviate the anxiety level. When students feel confident of having the skills to achieve the targeted goals, they would successfully transfer the amount of anxiety into a more positive driving force (Chen, 2007).

#### *Alerting about fears*

Finally, a practical way to reduce anxiety level might be to let the anxious students understand where their feelings of uneasiness come from; since, knowing what situations make them anxious could help them to be prepared in advance (Chen, 2007). If learners recognize their fears, they will be able to interpret anxiety-provoking situations in more realistic ways and eventually choose to approach rather than avoid an anxiety-evoking situation (Seller, 2000).

The limitations of this study clearly include it being limited to the EFL learners of the Departments of English and Zoology in Jagannath University. In addition, it investigated only the learners' perceptions and experiences in search for sources, effects and solutions. It was also strictly limited to some subject variables like gender, level of instruction, nature of course work and academic achievement. In addition, this paper neither explicated the correlation between test anxiety and performance nor accounted for the ways test anxiety affects performance. Finally, it did not focus on any effects of the individual's sources of anxiety either. So, further analysis concerning these issues would explore new understandings on the test anxiety suffered by Bangladeshi EFL learners.

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## Appendix

**Table 1:** Test Anxiety Level of the EFL learners

Item Number	Mean (N=97)	Standard deviation	Standard Error Mean
1. I worry while I am taking a test.	3.57	0.99	0.10
2. While taking a test, I am thinking that other students are better than I am.	3.25	1.36	0.14
3. When I know that I will take a test, I do not feel confident and relaxed.	2.84	1.29	0.13
4. During the test, I am thinking unrelated things about the class.	2.34	1.22	0.12
5. I feel worried when I learn that I would take a test.	3.06	1.34	0.14
6. During the test, I think I will fail.	1.49	0.83	0.08
7. After the test, I feel worried.	2.93	1.14	0.12
8. I cannot feel confident even if I have good grades.	2.21	1.22	0.12
9. After the test, I feel I could do better.	4.00	1.03	0.10
10. During the test, my emotions affect my performance negatively.	2.66	1.21	0.12
11. During the test, I forget what I know.	2.80	0.95	0.10
12. I feel worried when I study for a test.	3.23	1.26	0.13
13. The more I work, the more confused I get.	2.35	1.38	0.14
14. During the test, I cannot be sure if I will succeed.	2.36	1.19	0.12
15. Tests bother me much.	2.98	1.29	0.13
16. I feel pressured by time limits during a test.	3.95	1.29	0.13
17. When I have bad grades, I study less.	1.76	1.16	0.12
18. I would learn more if I did not have tests.	1.82	1.31	0.13
19. Tests affect my performance negatively.	1.79	0.90	0.09
20. I worry even when I am prepared well.	2.31	1.25	0.13
21. I worry when I am not prepared well.	4.48	0.81	0.08
22. I feel crammed/forced/pressurized before an exam.	3.94	1.27	0.13



**Table 2:** Test anxiety levels of the respondents in relation to gender

Item Number	Mean (M) and Standard Deviation (SD)							
	1 <sup>st</sup> year 2 <sup>nd</sup> Semester (English)				1 <sup>st</sup> year 2 <sup>nd</sup> Semester (Zoology)			
	Female		Male		Female		Male	
	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD
1.	4.45	0.82	3.43	0.65	3.91	0.83	3.36	1.39
2.	4.27	1.27	3.07	1.27	3.82	1.25	3.36	1.74
3.	2.82	0.98	2.79	0.89	3.00	1.48	3.14	1.41
4.	2.45	0.93	1.57	0.85	2.00	0.89	1.86	1.03
5.	4.18	0.98	3.57	0.85	3.91	1.04	2.50	1.40
6.	1.73	0.79	1.29	0.61	1.27	0.47	1.57	1.09
7.	3.36	1.12	3.21	1.31	2.91	1.14	3.43	1.16
8.	2.55	1.29	2.07	0.83	2.09	1.04	2.07	1.44
9.	4.09	0.83	4.29	0.83	3.64	1.03	4.00	1.24
10.	3.09	1.30	3.14	1.46	3.09	1.14	2.64	1.45
11.	2.82	0.75	2.71	0.47	2.82	0.87	2.43	1.02
12.	4.00	1.41	2.93	1.27	4.09	1.04	2.71	1.26
13.	2.82	1.25	1.79	1.31	2.91	1.70	2.64	1.60
14.	2.55	0.93	2.00	1.18	2.64	0.92	2.21	1.48
15.	3.27	1.35	2.57	1.50	3.45	1.13	3.00	1.36
16.	4.45	1.29	4.21	1.12	3.64	1.29	4.29	1.20
17.	1.82	1.17	1.21	0.80	2.55	1.51	1.79	1.19
18.	1.91	1.14	1.29	1.07	2.00	1.48	2.43	1.55
19.	1.64	0.92	1.29	0.61	2.18	0.98	2.14	0.86
20.	2.73	1.49	2.29	0.91	2.27	1.42	1.79	1.58
21.	3.82	1.08	4.43	1.09	4.73	0.65	4.43	0.85
22.	4.45	0.82	4.07	1.21	4.55	0.69	3.43	1.79

**Table 3:** Test anxiety levels of the respondents in relation to the level of instruction and nature of the course

Item Number	Mean (M) and Standard Deviation (SD)							
	1 <sup>st</sup> year 2 <sup>nd</sup> Semester (English)		2 <sup>nd</sup> year 1 <sup>st</sup> Semester (English)		3 <sup>rd</sup> year 1 <sup>st</sup> Semester (English)		1 <sup>st</sup> year 2 <sup>nd</sup> Semester (Zoology)	
	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD
1.	3.88	0.88	3.39	0.99	3.38	0.82	3.60	1.19
2.	3.60	1.38	2.87	1.29	2.92	1.10	3.56	1.53
3.	2.80	0.91	2.74	1.45	2.63	1.41	3.16	1.34
4.	1.96	0.98	2.09	1.12	3.46	1.10	1.88	0.97
5.	3.84	0.94	3.04	1.19	2.13	1.30	3.20	1.35
6.	1.48	0.71	1.57	0.99	1.50	0.78	1.44	0.87
7.	3.28	1.21	2.70	1.06	2.50	0.98	3.20	1.15
8.	2.28	1.06	2.04	1.22	2.25	1.39	2.24	1.23
9.	4.20	0.82	4.22	1.00	3.71	1.08	3.88	1.17
10.	3.12	1.36	2.26	1.14	2.54	0.88	2.68	1.28
11.	2.76	0.60	2.83	1.27	2.88	0.90	2.76	1.01
12.	3.40	1.41	2.70	1.29	3.50	0.88	3.28	1.31
13.	2.24	1.36	2.35	1.53	1.88	0.90	2.92	1.53
14.	2.24	1.09	2.30	1.11	2.54	1.25	2.36	1.35
15.	2.88	1.45	2.61	1.03	3.04	1.37	3.36	1.22
16.	4.32	1.18	4.13	1.18	3.50	1.35	3.84	1.37
17.	1.48	1.00	1.65	1.07	1.79	1.14	2.12	1.36



18.	1.56	1.12	1.57	1.08	1.92	1.41	2.24	1.51
19.	1.44	0.77	1.70	0.82	1.88	0.99	2.16	0.90
20.	2.48	1.19	2.13	1.25	2.46	1.14	2.16	1.43
21.	4.16	1.11	4.61	0.66	4.63	0.49	4.56	0.77
22.	4.24	1.05	3.74	1.18	3.92	1.32	4.04	1.49

**Table 4:** Test anxiety levels and academic achievements

Item Number	Mean (M) and Standard Deviation (SD)			
	Good Grade		Bad Grade	
	M	SD	M	SD
1.	3.78	0.97	3.38	0.96
2.	2.56	1.13	3.44	1.26
3.	3.11	1.17	3.56	1.36
4.	1.44	0.73	2.31	0.95
5.	3.33	1.00	3.50	1.15
6.	1.67	1.00	1.63	0.72
7.	3.00	1.22	2.63	1.20
8.	2.78	1.20	2.50	1.21
9.	4.00	0.87	4.19	0.91
10.	2.33	1.00	2.69	1.25
11.	2.44	0.73	2.63	1.02
12.	2.56	1.33	2.94	1.13
13.	2.56	1.74	2.50	1.63
14.	2.11	0.78	3.00	1.19
15.	1.67	1.32	2.81	1.33
16.	3.22	1.48	3.31	1.35
17.	1.44	0.53	2.13	1.26
18.	1.67	0.85	2.50	1.55
19.	1.56	0.73	1.81	1.22
20.	2.78	1.20	2.69	1.40
21.	4.33	0.87	4.13	1.02
22.	3.56	1.24	3.38	1.15