

THE COLLISION OF SELF EFFICACY AND GENDER ON TRAIT ANXIETY

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Abstract

The study investigated the collision of self-efficacy and gender on trait anxiety in a sample of one hundred and sixty (160) undergraduate students of National Open University of Nigeria (NOUN). Their age ranged between 16–26 years with the average age of 21. It was hypothesized that self-efficacy and gender will not play any significant role in the participant's reports of trait anxiety. ANOVA statistics used as a statistical package for data analysis showed that self-efficacy played a significant role in the participant's reports of anxiety (183, $df = 1$, $P > 0.01$) with participants who have low self – efficacy reporting higher anxiety than those with high self-efficacy. On the other hand, female and male students did differ in their report of anxiety. Discussion highlighted the important of self-efficiency as a personality attribute that moderate a person's experience of anxiety.

Keywords; collision, self-efficacy, gender and trait anxiety.

Introduction

Anxiety as a diffuse, vague, highly unpleasant feeling of fear and apprehension has been shown to be an important factor that influences other psychological factors (Mills, Pajares & Herron, 2006), different authors gave varies definitions to anxiety depending on their area of interest. Sandura (1997) defined anxiety from the state perspective, asserting that anxiety is a state of anticipatory apprehension over possible deleterious happening. However, Soligman, Walker and Rosenhan (2001) gave a broader definition of anxiety as a psychological and physiological state.

Characterized by cognitive, somatic, emotional and behavioural components, these components according to Seligman et al (2001) combined to great an unpleasant feeling that is typically associated with uneasiness, apprehension, worry or fear, Anxiety (state or trait) embody apprehension and avoidant behaviour that often interfere with performance in every day life (Mills et al 2006). Again, anxiety is a generalized mood condition that can often occur without an identifiable triggering stimulus. Trait, unlike state is a more enduring type of anxiety and is often conceived as a predisposed attribute. Spiel Berger (1983) noted that trait anxiety is a relatively stable predisposition of an individual to being anxious. However, some psychological variables play significant roles in understanding anxiety in human. Some of these variables when identified can aid proper plans for therapy to help client with anxiety problem. Some of these variables includes:- self – efficacy and gender. Self efficacy is a factor which taps the cognitive component of individuals and therefore, is hypothesized to play significant role in the serenity and impact of anxiety (Akin, 2010). Self – efficacy is conceptualized to be the judgment of a person's ability to perform a task within a specific or generalized domain (Bandura, 2006). Gender on the to her hand, as a variable of interest in this study is refers to a synonym for sex (male and female).

It is a construct grounded in social cognitive theory and is generally conceived as a personal belief in one's capabilities, individuals who have high self-efficacy are more likely to attribute their failures to low effort rather than low ability whereas low efficacy in individuals attribute their failure to low ability (Dwck, 1986). One attribute between self-efficacy and anxiety is that both are influenced by the cognitive component of an individual. Self-efficacy refers to one's belief and expectations regarding achievement of goals: it is related to control, personal agency beliefs and other constructs that focus on contingencies and perceived success. Changes in self – efficacy should affect mood and behaviour and evaluation of an individuals expectations provides a window on his or her motivation and likelihood of success. It is a person's belief concerning his or her ability to perform successfully on a given task. It is a major determinant of whether a person will attempt a given task or not, how much effort will be expended, and how much persistence will be displayed with pursuing the task in the face of obstacle. According to self –

efficacy theory, perceived self – efficacy influences, and in turn is influenced by thought patterns affective arousal and choice behaviour as well as task performance (Bandura, 1986).

Self-efficacy beliefs affect academic performance by influencing a number of behavioural and psychological variable. Bandura (1986) asserted that self-efficacy beliefs students are often better predictors of their successes than they are objective assessments of their abilities.

Bandura's (1997) social cognitive theory asserted that humans can control their behaviour and therefore subscribe to the motion that individual possesses a system to self beliefs that enable them to exercise control over their thought (self – efficacy), feelings (anxiety) and actions. Those with a stronger sense of efficacy are more apt to take on the deleterious happening that breed stress with positive expectations and are often more successful in transforming them into positive events (Mills et al 2006).

Generally, social cognitive theory (SCT) assumed that individual acquired knowledge as his or her environment converges with personal characteristics and personal experience. New experience are evaluated vis-à-vis the past. Prior experience helps to subsequently guide and inform the individual as to how present should be handled.

Self-efficacy is defined as a per belief about their ability to organized and execute courses of action necessary to achieve a goal. In other words, persons with strong self – efficacy beliefs are more confident in their capacity to execute a behaviour. Beliefs about self – efficacy have a significant impact on our goals and accomplishments by influencing personal choice, motivation and our patterns and emotional reactions. For example, we tend to avoid threatening situations that we belief exceed our coping skills. Perceived self-efficacy also effects how successfully goals are accomplished by influencing the level of effort and persistence a person will demonstrate in the faces of obstacle. That is the stronger, the perceived self – efficacy, the more active or efforts. Higher self – efficacy is also associated with more persistence, a trait that allows us to gain corrective experiences that reinforce our sense of self – efficacy.

Because of its effects on personal choice, motivation, effect and persistence, self-efficacy has severe implications for healthy behaviour, such as condom use, non smoking, among others. For example, high self-efficacy influences whether or not a person commits to condom use in the face of social obstacle. Using evidence – based interventions, we can influence self – efficacy through several channels.

Firstly, performance accomplishments it is one's personal mastery experiences defined as past successes or failures. These experiences from expectations that are generalized to other situations that may be similar or substantially different from the original experience. For example, strong efficacy expectations can result from failures. We can increase personal mastery for a behaviour through participant Modeling, performance exposure, self instructed performances and performance decentralization, the through which aversive behaviour is paired with a pleasant or 'relaxing experience'.

Secondly, vicarious experiences; it is observing others perform threatening activities without adverse, consequences can also enhance personal self-efficacy by demonstrating that the activity is "do – able" with a little effort and persistence, vicarious experience can be enhanced through live modeling (observing others perform an activity or symbolize modeling).

Thirdly, verbal persuasion; people are led to believe they can successfully accomplish a task behaviour through the use of suggestion, exhortation or self instruction. However, because verbal persuasion is not grounded in personal experience, it is a weaker induce of efficacy and may be extinguished by histories of fast failures.

Lastly, emotional arousal, we can enhance perceived self-efficacy by diminishing emotional arousal such as fear, stress and physical agitation since they are associated with decreased performance, reduced success, and other evidence behaviour. Emotional arousal can be mitigated with repeated symbolic exposure that allows people to practice dealing with stress relaxation techniques and symbolic desensitization.

Social learning theory describes the acquisition of society valuable skills that are developed exclusively or primarily in a society group. Social learning depends on group dynamics and how individuals either succeed or fail at dynamic interactions. Social learning promotes the development of individual emotional and practical skills as well as the perception of oneself and the acceptance of others with their individual competencies and limitations. Self – efficacy levels reflects a person's understanding of what skills they can offer in a group setting.

In a study by Obi Nwosu, (2008) using undergraduate students, he found that self-efficacy play a significant role on undergraduate performance. The present finding is in concordance with the studies by Akin (2008), Graham (1999) and Mills et al (2006) who showed in their studies that participants with high

self-efficacy reported low anxiety, than those with low self – efficacy. The finding supported Bandura’s (1992) social cognitive theory adopted for this study. According to social cognitive theory, individuals with stronger sense of efficacy are more opt to take on the deleterious happenings that may breed stress with positive expectations and are often more successful in transforming them into positive events. (Mills et al, 2006). This confidence and success acts as a catalyst that stabilizes on individual and reduces the anxiety of facing a similar challenge in future and can be generalized to other situations. Bandura (1997) further postulated that individuals experience anxiety when they believe themselves to be incapable of managing potentially detrimental events.

Method

Participants

The participants were hundred and sixty (160) undergraduate students of National Open University of Nigeria (NOUN) who volunteered to participate in the research. They included 90 male and 90 female students of, 200 level and 300 level and 400 level of study with their age ranged from 20 – 40 with the average age of 30.

Instrument

One of the scales used for the study was the general self-efficacy scale developed by Jerusalem and Schwarzer (1989). The scale contain 10 items which are arrange in a 4 point likert form, ranging from 1 = not all true to 4 = exactly true. The authors found a cronbach alpha ranging from 70 to 90 in a sample of 23 nations.

The other instrument used was the state – trait anxiety inventory, form y – 2 (STAI, Y – 2) developed by Spielberger (1983). STAI, (Y – 2) has 20 items designed to measure trait anxiety – the relatively stable predisposition of an individual to being anxious. It was scored on four point scale. Some items are direct scored whereas some are reverse. Scored Speilberg (1983) reported an alpha of .90 and .91 for male and female samples, and a test – test reliability of .77. Onyeizugbo (2007) found a con-current validity of .58 when the STAI, Y – 2 was administered together with the university of Nigeria stress symptoms (Scale UNSSS).

Procedure

The instruments were administered to the volunteered participants during the lecture free period. They were given instructions on how to fill the instruments and after filling, the instruments were collected immediately. These instruments were later scored and the data was analyzed using SPSS 16.00.

Design/Statistics

The study adopted the cross – sectional survey design. 2 x 2 ANOVA statistics was used to test the hypotheses.

Results

Summary Table: 2 – way ANOVA showing the influence of self –efficacy on trait anxiety

Source	Sum of Square	df	Mean Score	F	P
Total	7920.5	159			
Factor A	1506.8	1	1506.8	45.6	<.01
Factor B	5522.4	1	5522.4	167.2	<.01
A x B	6042.8	1	6042.8	183	<.01
W	315.5	156	33.02		

The results shows that self efficacy played a significant role in trait anxiety with $f. = f(1,156) = 45.6$, as shown in table. The table also shown that the mean score on anxiety for the participants with low self – efficacy were higher than the mean score for those with high self – efficacy mean = 13.7, mean = 10.5.

Also there was gender difference in trait anxiety $f(1, 156) = 167.20$, $d(f = 1 p >. 01)$. This implies that anxiety is peculiarly of gender and there will be a main and interactive influence of self efficacy and gender on trait anxiety.

Further more, because, the obtained value is greater than the artificial value therefore we reject null hypothesis and accept alternative hypothesis which concludes that there will be a main and interactive influence of self-efficacy and gender on trait anxiety.

Discussion

This work examined the role of self – efficacy and gender in trait anxiety. Most of the researcher similar to the present work emphasized more on state anxiety (Akin, 2008, Mills et al. (2006). The finding of the present investigation showed that self-efficacy played a significant role in anxiety level reported by the participants. Those with low self – efficacy taps the cognitive and emotional components of anxiety and is

seen as individuals judgment of his/her ability to perform a task within a specific or generalizes domain. The present finding is in concordance with the studies by Akin (2008). Graham, (1999) and Mills et al (2006) who showed in their studies that participants with high self-efficacy reported low – anxiety, than those with low self efficacy.

The finding supported Bandura's (1997) social cognitive theory adopted for this study. According to social cognitive theory, individuals with stronger sense of efficacy are more opt to take on the deleterious happenings that may breed stress with positive expectations and are often more successful in transforming them into positive events. This confidence and success acts as catalyst that stabilized an individual and reduces the anxiety of facing a similar challenge in future and can be generalized to other situations. Bandura (1997) further postulated that individual's experience anxiety when they believe themselves to be in capable of managing potentially detrimental events.

The finding is implicated in planning and designing a therapy for clients with anxiety problems. Anxiety (specific or generalized) has a lot to do with the self perceptions; therefore therapist may as well work on the self – efficacy of clients with anxiety. Stimuger, (1975) postulated a self enhancing model which held the notion that all individual can be motivated to maintain a positive self – concept restores confidence in one's self which in turn crate a sense of control and stability in an individual.

Gender was found to be a significant factor in trait anxiety. This finding is inline with the work of Compell (1999) as well as with the work of Nakazato & Shimomka (1999). One notable remark about their finding is that their participants includes patients with diagnosed clinical condition and those who are more advanced in age; unlike the present work in which normal and functional undergraduate population participated. But the finding of the present work is contrary to the study by foot and Kozzycki (2004) who reported no significant gender differences in anxiety report. The presence of gender differences in trait anxiety could be due to the general changes that are taken place in the society today and also the popular notion that we are living in a male dominated society.

Although, women are becoming quite ambitious and courageous in pursuing their life dreams. The participants were university students who compared to their counterpart in society, aim high in pursuit of their dreams and as such the gender gap seen to have been relatively closed.

Anxiety is an important psychological factor among students, pathological anxiety is related to reports of all health failure and poor academic performance, mental break down and poor peer relationship (Elhiot and McGregory 1999), Selfert (1995). The causal ordering of anxiety and self-efficacy is not clear (Akin, 2008) but the important thing is that high self-efficacy is associated with low anxiety, therefore, self-efficacy enhancement programs should be encouraged among students, pathological anxiety is related to reports of all health failure and poor academic performance, mental breakdown and poor peer 'relationship (Elhiot and McGregory 1999), Selfert (1995). The casual ordering of anxiety and self-efficacy is not clear (Akin, 2008) but the important thing is that high self-efficacy is associated with low anxiety; therefore, self efficacy enhancement programs should be encouraged among students.

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