

**Investigating the Relationship between Social Avoidance and Distress (SAD),
and the Learners' Academic Achievement in the Case of Tahri Mohamed
University Students (Algeria) (Bechar)**

Mehdani Miloud^{1*}

¹Tahri Mohamed University -Bechar (Algeria), mmehdani@gmail.com

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Abstract

The aim of the study is to investigate the relationship between foreign language classroom anxiety scores, and the learners' academic performance. It also seeks to know if there is any evidence of a difference between males and females vis-à-vis social avoidance and distress, and their respective scores. In order to address these concerns, 88 first year LMD students from Bechar department of English were sampled in the study. The students had to respond to a questionnaire that contains 28 items. So, an independent samples t-test was run to explore the aforementioned relationships. The findings reveal that there is no significant relationship between the variables mentioned above. Equally, there is no significant difference between males and females in terms of social avoidance and distress.

Keywords: social anxiety, social avoidance, students' performance, social distress

ملخص:

هدف من هذه الدراسة هو التحقق من العلاقة المحتملة بين درجات القلق في فصول اللغة الأجنبية والأداء الأكاديمي للمتعلمين. كما أنه يحقق فيما إذا كان هناك دليل على وجود اختلاف بين الأولاد والبنات في التجنب والضييق الاجتماعي، ودرجات كل منهم. للإجابة على هذه الأسئلة، تم أخذ عينات من 88 طالبًا في السنة الأولى من LMD من قسم اللغة الإنجليزية لهذه الدراسة، والتي تم تحليلها من خلال مقياس التجنب الاجتماعي والضييق المعروف باسم "S.A.D." وبالتالي، تم إجراء اختبار t للعينات المستقلة لاستكشاف العلاقات المذكورة أعلاه. أظهرت النتائج عدم وجود علاقة ذات دلالة إحصائية بين المتغيرات المذكورة أعلاه. وبالمثل، لا يوجد فرق كبير بين الأولاد والبنات من حيث التجنب الاجتماعي والضييق.

*Corresponding author

الكلمات المفتاحية: القلق الاجتماعي، عدم الراحة، الخوف، أداء المتعلم، القلق، التجنب الاجتماعي

I.INTRODUCTION

During the past 25 years, psychologists and educators have always shown growing concern about the possibility of any interconnection between anxiety and the learner's performance. In their effort to find an answer to the question, researchers, then, fell back on the drive-reduction theory which acknowledges the existence of some relationship between anxiety and the learners' academic achievement (Heinrich, 1979). With this respect, they differentiate between state anxiety and trait anxiety. State anxiety denotes a momentary interval of apprehensive frame of mind characterized by some haziness or no specific attention followed by corporal alertness which is unfamiliar to the individual undergoing it. Trait anxiety, on the other hand, refers to a permanent anxiety condition of unspecific apprehension that exceeds the average levels of alertness (Matsumoto, 2009). Anxiety, however, does not always have negative effects on the individual. Denny (1966) and Spielberger (1966b), for example, argue that individuals with high anxiety usually achieve high profitability in their academic achievements, unlike those with low anxiety

1.1.Social anxiety

The phrases "social phobia" and "social anxiety" are used interchangeably in some literature even though, some social phobia is regarded "as an extreme form of social anxiety", Social phobia refers to a strikingly noticeable constant apprehension of one or more social experiences in which the individual has to show up to people they do not know, and before whom they may be subject to their probing (Mikulincer, and Phillip R. Shaver, 2015).

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Social phobia, which usually begins in mid-adolescence pubescence, is an affective variable that upsets people's well-being. In research from Delgado et al. (2016), social anxiety engenders deleterious effects on their academic outcomes. It refers to debilitating behaviour disorder owing to which the individual suffers from persistent and social isolation (Leitenberg, 1990). It is also a persistent fear of one or more situations in which the individual is exposed to possible scrutiny by others and fears that he or she may do something or act in a way that will be humiliating or embarrassing (DSM-III-R APA, 1987).

Socially phobic people display deep pessimism about the future and pathetic behaviour. They also experience a sluggish disposition and a pathological withdrawal from social experiences (Hofmann, S. G., & Otto, M. W., 2008). Additionally, these types of people resort to some sort of defence mechanism commonly known as safety behaviour. So, according to Angel Greene (2016), to contend with an embarrassing situation, they take a low profile, stay behind the scene, hide social awkwardness by avoiding eye contact, and seek refuge next to people they may socialize with effortlessly. In so doing, they feel at ease and more secure; they, then, get round in Szyzka's words (2017,p.53) "an unavoidable situation, which is personally threatening, either physically or psychologically."

A more complicated facet of social anxiety is its development into chronic anxiety which usually takes the form of paranoia mental disturbance marked by systematized illusory perceptions and the projection of personal conflicts, which are assigned to the supposed animosity towards others (DSM-III-R).

A further socially phobics ordeal is their exposure to people's evaluation, particularly when they have to deliver a speech, use public facilities and refreshment rooms, which account for social apprehension and some uneasiness regarding social experiences. Additionally, social phobics condition is equally accentuated by other

people's lower level of agreeableness, specifically when the victims of social phobia are viewed as outgroups.

1.2. Aetiology of Social Phobia

Even though more research needs to be done about the aetiology of social phobia, several studies point out that the disorder produces clinical manifestation during puerility or teenage years, with a mean age that ranges between 15 and 16 (Schneier, Johnson, Hornig, Liebowitz, & Weissman, 1992). Some researchers in the field impute social anxiety disorders to heredity in that children with social anxiety are anxiety-prone themselves (Fyer, Mannuzza, Chapman, Liebowitz, & Klein, 1993; Reich & Yates, 1988; Tillfors, Furmark, Ekselius, & Fredrikson, 2001). These researchers' claim is yet debatable when it concerns children's genetic proclivity to social phobia. Other researchers, however, believe that such a trend may not be attributable to heredity alone. The latter also believe that other psychological disorders underlie family members to social phobia. Besides, the fact the study that had been conducted involved limited sample sizes adds to the credibility of such a study (Biedermann, Hirshfeld-Becker, et al., 2001; Schwartz et al., 1999).

1.3. Temperamental Qualities

Behavioural inhibition is one of the temperamental qualities that affect people with anxiety disorder in general and adolescents in particular. In this context, Rubin and Asendorpf (1993, p.138) define the term inhibition as 'the disposition to be wary and fearful when encountering novel (that is, unfamiliar) situations.' When behavioural inhibition takes the form of temperament, it applies to people with shyness and timidity, along with those abnormally gripped with apprehension and

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withdrawal as they grow unable to act dynamically in their environment (Matsumoto, 2009).

What is essential to realize though, is that the degree to which children's intercourse with others in general and their parents, in particular, can underlie children's behavioural inhibition, shyness and social avoidance is so far unknown. (Crozier & Alden, 2010)

2.1.Social Avoidance

Fostering friendly connections with comrades is vital for 'teenagers', for the latter contribute to the nurture of the individual's social skills and their cognitive faculty: two essential factors for adult functioning (Ingersoll, 1989). Furthermore, socialization appears to be supportive as it aids the teenagers' sense of identity and decreases their reliance on family controls (Dusek, 1991; Ingersoll, 1989). Socially disordered people cannot cope with social experiences as they are in difficulty in social relationships. Instead of socializing with others, they favour avoiding circumstances they find inimical. In this respect, Watson, D., & Friend, R. (1969) defined social avoidance as "avoiding being with, talking to, or escaping from others for any reason."

The reiteration of stressful experiences drives socially disordered people to develop a defense instinct to cope with embarrassing situations. One of these, as aforementioned, is the building of some automaticity to avoid these uncomfortable conditions by maintaining constant hypervigilance, which drives them to be on guard not only against present dangers but also future ones (Salkind, 2008). This automaticity of avoidance possibly unintentionally clear the ground for troublesome situations which are conducive to a causal nexus that encompasses a surge of anxiety and instability in their temperament.

2.2.Social Distress

Watson, D., & Friend, R. (1969) distinguish between negative emotions and lack of negative emotions. Whereas the former denotes a frame of mind that includes tenseness or anxiety, and distress in social intercourses, the latter refers to 'the reported lack of negative emotion' that encompasses calmness, lack of mental strain, and comfort. Both authors insist that the opposite of negative emotion should be 'not the presence of some positive emotion but the lack of unhappiness.'

Breakup distress in university venues is one of the numbers of aetiologies of distress which may be likened to complicated grief, deep and sustained cycle of mental suffering consequential to a shock of bereavement, or anguish ensuing an amorous adventure severance (Horowitz, Siegel, Holen, Bonanno, Milbrath, & Stinson, 1997). Likewise, the learners suffer frequent bouts of sleeplessness whose rate was "significantly higher in the complicated versus the uncomplicated grief samples (22% versus 17%), "and inadequate sleep was closely allied to gloomy thoughts as a result of an affliction that haunted their dreams (Field 2011, p.382)

Adolescents' reinforcement of their social skills is contingent on the potential bonds they forge with their chums and compeers, which in the long run aids their proper functioning in adulthood (Ingersoll, 1989). Adolescents' socialization also clears the ground for easing their 'sense of personal identity,' a key component to reduce their reliance on parental control (Dusek, 1991; Ingersoll, 1989).

3.1.Literature Review

As designers of the Social Avoidance and Distress (SAD) scale, Watson, D., & Friend, R. (1969) reveal that people with high SAD in its true/false format have some propensity towards social isolation, group work

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avoidance, and reservedness. They also display some uneasiness and less faith as to fostering social relationships with others, but may not refuse to appear for appointments.

As for male/ female variation in the SAD score, Watson and Friend asserted that males registered more social avoidance and distress than females. Their study also revealed some significant difference in mean scores on: " males, ($N = 60$) 11.20; females ($N = 145$) 8.24" (Watson, D., & Friend, R. 1969, 452). The Watson's and Friend's true /false version of the SAD also reveals the following t-test and p.value: ($t = 2.64, p < .01$) (Bringle, Phillips, & Hudson, 2010).

3.2.Current Study

This study, however, does not use Watson's & Friend's True/False format of the SAD. It will adopt Patterson's & Strauss's Likert scale(1972). The latter is a 5-point scale that ranges from strongly disagree to strongly disagree. It measures two subsets of the SAD: social avoidance and social distress, two forms of social anxiety

Method

The Likert questionnaire format that was developed by Patterson and Strauss was given to Tahri Mohamed University First-year students of English at Tahri Mohamed University, Bechar, Algeria. Out of 100 students, only 88 returned it ($N=88$). 52 females and 36 males. The choice of first-year students was deliberate, for they are prone to some sort of anxiety, being novice at university.

Research Questions

This study attempts to answer two major questions relative to the SAD:

- Is there a significant relationship between social avoidance and distress and the learners' academic outcomes?
- Is there any evidence of a difference between males and females vis-à-vis social avoidance and distress?

$$H_1 : \mu \text{ males} \neq \mu \text{ female}$$

$$H_0 : \mu \text{ males} = \mu \text{ female}$$

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

| Reliability Statistics | | |
|------------------------|--|------------|
| Cronbach's Alpha | Cronbach's Alpha Based on Standardized Items | N of Items |
| ,854 | ,851 | 28 |

Correlations

| | | Grammar | Sad_Total |
|-----------|---------------------|---------|-----------|
| Grammar | Pearson Correlation | 1 | ,097 |
| | Sig. (2-tailed) | | ,368 |
| | N | 88 | 88 |
| Sad_Total | Pearson Correlation | ,097 | 1 |
| | Sig. (2-tailed) | ,368 | |
| | N | 88 | 88 |

Considering the correlations table above, we can safely conclude that there is no significant relationship between grammar scores and social avoidance and distress, $r(86) = ,368$ $p = ,05$

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Independent Samples Test

| | | Levene's Test for Equality of Variances | | t-test for Equality of Means | | | | | | |
|-----|-----------------------------|---|------|------------------------------|--------|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------------|---|---------|
| | | F | Sig. | t | Df | Sig. (2-tailed) | Mean Difference | Std. Error Difference | 95% Confidence Interval of the Difference | |
| | | | | | | | | | Lower | Upper |
| SAD | Equal variances assumed | .346 | .558 | 2.171 | 86 | .033 | 3.98718 | 1.83695 | .33545 | 7.63891 |
| | Equal variances not assumed | | | 2.086 | 64.415 | .041 | 3.98718 | 1.91145 | | 7.80527 |

Results for Levene's Test for Equality of Variances

$$H_0: \sigma_1^2 = \sigma_2^2$$

$$H_1: \sigma_1^2 \neq \sigma_2^2$$

$$TS=F=.346;p=,558$$

Because the Sig (.558) > $\alpha(.05)$, we fail to reject H_0 . We do not have any evidence that the two groups are different from each other.

Then, there is no significant difference between males and females in terms of social avoidance and distress.

4. CONCLUSION

The study attempted to shed light on the types of anxiety and the potential existence of some correlation between social avoidance and distress (SAD) on the one hand, and the learners' academic outcomes on the other. It also sought to see whether there was any evidence of a possible difference between males and females vis-à-vis SAD. Contrary to what has been expected, there was no correlation between the

aforementioned variables. Additionally, there was no significant difference between males and females as to SAD.

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