CHAPTER FIVE

SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.0 Introduction

This chapter contains the summary, conclusions and recommendations of the study. In summarizing the data, conclusions were drawn about the incidence of test anxiety and the relationship of test anxiety to selected variables. A summary and its conclusions are presented for each of the seven research questions.

The sample surveyed for this study was as follows:

The ages of the subjects ranged from 18 to 20 years. Males made up 37.6% of the sample and women made up 62.4% of the sample. 24.7% of the subjects came from urban areas while the remaining 75.3% were from rural areas. The number of years these subjects had studied English before entering tertiary institutions was the same, that is, twelve years.

5.1 Research Question One

The first research question asked whether there is incidence of test anxiety of ESL examinations in the sample surveyed. Previous studies have suggested that
test anxiety is a phenomenon experienced by students when taking examinations.

In this study, almost half of the subjects experienced some degree of test anxiety when taking their English language examinations. This can be seen from the self-ratings of these subjects in their scores in the AAT-N. The subjects scored between 13 and 43 out of a total of 50. Here a high self-rating score corresponds to high test anxiety.

5.2 Research Question Two

This research question asked whether there was any relationship between test anxiety and test performance in the English examinations.

To answer this question, the subjects were divided into three groups. 35.5% (n=33) of this sample was categorized as high-anxious, 34.4% (n=28) as low anxious and 30.1% (n=32) as moderate-anxious based on the subjects’ AAT-N scores. The division into the three groups was also to make comparison of the three groups’ performances in terms of test scores of the English examinations easier to calculate. This method of dividing the group into thirds was replicated from Madsen (1982) who divided his subjects into thirds based on the scores obtained in the AAT. Subjects with high scores were put in the high-anxious category and subjects with low scores were put in the low-anxious category.
Previous studies have indicated that high-test anxiety interfered with the performance of students taking tests or examinations. The findings obtained in this study concur with findings in other previous studies of this nature. The Hi-Anx group average examination scores was the lowest among the three anxiety groups while the average examination scores in the Low-Anx group was the highest. Significant differences were found among the three groups. The Low-Anx group and the Mod-Anx group performed better in the examinations than the Hi-Anx group.

Pearson product moment correlations were computed to examine the relationship between test anxiety and test performance. A negative correlation was found for each group. For the Hi-Anx group $p = 0.987$, for the Mod-Anx group $p = 0.938$ and for the Low-Anx group $p = 0.781$. The high correlation between test anxiety and test performance of the subjects in the three groups means that test performance is affected by test anxiety.

5.3 Research Question Three

This research question raised the question whether there was a relationship between English Language Classroom Anxiety (ELCAS) and test anxiety as measured by the Achievement Anxiety Test (AAT).
Previous studies have indicated that high language anxiety would affect students’ performance in class. It is also believed that high test anxiety would affect the students’ performance in an examination situation.

The scores obtained in the ELCAS in the three groups were computed. The mean score of the ELCAS was found to be higher for the Hi-Anx group than the Low-Anx group and the Mod-Anx group. This is consistent with the claim that subjects with high language anxiety would also experience high test anxiety.

Correlations between the ELCAS and test anxiety were investigated. Negative correlations between classroom anxiety and test anxiety levels for Hi-Anx, Mod-Anx and Low-Anx ($p = 0.981$, $p = 0.655$ and $p = 0.815$ respectively) were found. This suggests that a subject with high language anxiety was more likely to score higher for test anxiety. It also suggests that a subject with high language anxiety was more likely to be a victim of test anxiety.

5.4 Research Question Four

This research question raised the question whether female learners would experience higher test anxiety than male learners of English.

Previous studies have indicated that there was a significant difference between test anxiety scores of males and females and that females typically scored
higher on the test anxiety scale and therefore would register higher levels of anxiety.

The findings show the males in the Hi-Anx group and Mod-Anx group experienced higher test anxiety than the females. Males had also indicated they experienced higher anxiety in the AAT. However, the females in the Low-Anx group exhibited higher test anxiety than the males. Overall, the males experienced slightly higher anxiety than the females. The findings are different than the results obtained in previous studies. All the previous studies are studies of students from Western countries and cultural differences may be the cause of this phenomenon.

5.5 Research Question Five

This research question examined the subjects' perception of the most anxiety-producing test of the four language skills and whether the test scores for the examination of the different skills would reflect this.

49.5% of the subjects' identified the speaking examination as the most anxiety-producing test of the four skills while 35.6% identified the writing component as the second most anxiety-producing test of the four skills. They found speaking and writing examinations more difficult compared to listening and reading. This is due to the subjects having to speak and write in the examinations and this causes anxiety in them.
Reading and listening tests may provoke different levels of anxiety in the subjects. For reading examinations, the subjects have time and opportunity to read and reread the texts many times over and therefore might not experience as much stress as in speaking examinations. In the listening examination, the subjects got the opportunity to listen to each text twice before they answered the multiple-choice questions. This might not provoke as much anxiety in the subjects as compared to the speaking examination.

The students’ perception that the speaking examination is the most difficult examination is not reflected in their test performance for this skill. The students’ mean score is the highest for the speaking examination in comparison to the other skills. The subjects might have rated the speaking examination as the one that produces the most anxiety because they were anxious or they lacked the confidence in themselves or have judged themselves poorer than in reality.

5.6 Research Question Six

This research question examined whether students from urban backgrounds have higher test anxiety than students from rural backgrounds.

It is widely believed that students from the rural areas in Malaysia are more anxious about English than students from the urban areas because rural students are generally less exposed to the language. The students from the urban areas
better and were less anxious when taking English examinations since they were likely to be more exposed to the language in their daily lives.

In addition, students from urban areas scored better in the speaking examination than students from rural areas in all three groups. This reinforces the belief that students’ backgrounds and the amount of exposure to the language have an impact on students’ anxiety and ultimately on students’ language proficiency.

5.8 Conclusion

This study examined test anxiety in relation to ESL examinations in Malay students at UiTM. The results obtained from this study concurred with current literature that test anxiety exists and was observed to have an impact on test performance in ESL examinations. Test anxiety is a big problem for students in evaluative situations and the more important is the result of the evaluation for academic success, the more stressful it will be for the students. As predicted, test anxiety has an impact on English Language performance.

The study also investigated classroom anxiety and its relationship with test anxiety in the use of English. High correlations were obtained which showed that the various relationships were significant. It was apparent therefore that students with high classroom anxiety in English would also experience high-test anxiety and this put them at a disadvantage. Examinations tend to favour
those who are not prone to anxiety and therefore are biased in their favour. Anxiety prone students do not perform as well as those who are not anxiety prone. The anxiety will interfere with and will affect their examination performance.

Male subjects in this study were found to exhibit higher anxiety than the females. This did not support the literature and other studies about the relationship between anxiety and gender. While sex differences exist, other factors such as physiological factors, psychological factors, needs and goals may also cause differences in anxiety between the sexes.

The students identified the speaking test to be the most anxiety-producing language examination of the four skills. However, the results obtained did not agree with this as the students' mean score for this skill was the highest among the other skills. This means the students did better than they thought.

Students from rural areas exhibited higher test anxiety than students from urban areas in this study. Students from urban areas have also been found to do better in the English examinations than students from rural areas. This was true for the overall results and specifically for the speaking examination. Thus, this difference can be attributed to the students' backgrounds and the amount of exposure they had to English.
In conclusion, this study has shown that the existence of test anxiety affected students' performance in evaluative situations in English. Where students were anxiety prone, the students' performance may not reflect the proficiency or mastery that the students had of the subject. So, it is necessary to ensure that in any evaluative situations test anxiety should be taken into account as an important affective factor in any testing situation.

5.9 Suggestions for further study

This study is a first attempt at ascertaining the existence of test anxiety in ESL examinations of Malay students at UiTM. Other studies are needed to further test the effects of test anxiety on language performance. The sample in this study contained more female subjects than males. Future studies can address this by using an equal number of male and female subjects. Similarly, it is recommended that there should be a balanced number of rural and urban subjects. This study was limited to only third semester students of the Faculty of Architecture, Planning and Surveying; other studies using subjects from other faculties at UiTM can be done.

5.10 Recommendations

Some recommendations based on this study are:

1. Test anxiety of ESL examinations exists among Malay students at UiTM.

This provides helpful insight for the ESL teachers in the teaching and
learning of English. With a knowledge of which students are more anxiety-prone, teachers can counsel and guide the students in the taking of examinations and to perform up to their capabilities. In the process of teaching, teachers should guide the students in examination strategies and answering different types of questions in the examination paper. Teachers could also familiarize students well with the format of the examination questions thereby at the same time minimising their anxiety in taking examinations.

2. In examinations, students have to remember a lot of information to help them to answer the examination questions. When students are anxious and stressed, they are preoccupied with coping with their own negative thoughts rather than with the tasks they have to do. This causes interference in information processing and results in performance being affected. In order to reduce students' stress and make them less test anxious, test setters should set questions on situations or topics that are familiar to the students. This familiarity of topics would help to minimise students' anxiety and help to alleviate any worries they might have prior to the examinations.

3. Students who are anxiety prone should be taught to deal with the testing situation. They should be taught the use of effective cognitive strategies such as maintaining positive motivation, test-taking strategies and how to cope with time pressure in order to minimise the effects of test anxieties which will result in lowered performance. Learning to handle the pressures
involved in a test situation will ultimately help the students to succeed in examinations and improve their test performance.

4. As the speaking examination is seen to be the most anxiety producing examination from the students’ perspective, the students’ examination performance may be improved by making the students more comfortable and less nervous. Examiners’ characteristics and behaviour such as being friendly, smiling, giving encouragement and adopting a relaxed attitude towards students can help to reduce students’ test anxiety.

5. Test setters should consider the use of continuous classroom assessments, project work or take-home assignments instead of formal examinations for students. For high anxious students, the removal of time pressure can lessen the effects of test anxiety. Sometimes for these students, it is not that they do not have knowledge of the items tested but it is that the testing factors affect their performance negatively. Hence it is anxiety rather than lack of knowledge that causes poor performance in evaluative situations.

5.11 Concluding Remarks

This study provides some insights into the testing situations and the anxieties faced by the students when taking ESL examinations. The findings of the study generally concur with current literature on test anxiety that negatively affects the performance of anxiety-prone students. Test anxiety interferes with
performance in evaluative situations. With better understanding of the relationship between test anxiety and evaluative measures, teachers should be able to reduce students' anxiety and improve students' performance. Because of the importance of examination results in students' future, it is vital that all students' examination scores reflect accurately what they know and not be affected by test anxiety and other test-taking factors.