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Experiencing Anxiety about Self-Efficacy during Teamwork

Abstract

Introduction: High perceived self-efficacy in teamwork is significant for the accomplishment of objectives typical of adolescence. The levels of trait-anxiety and state-anxiety among children and teenagers grow with age. Anxiety can be provoked by both situations at school and lack of acceptance from one's peer group. Girls with high levels of anxiety are more likely than boys to perceive themselves in negative terms.

The objective of the study: The purpose of this study was to identify the relationship between self-efficacy in relation to teamwork and the level of anxiety considered as either a state or a trait (defined as a relatively fixed disposition).

Resources and methodology: The survey covered 66 first-year schoolchildren from lower-secondary schools in Lublin. Tools used: *The Self-Efficacy in Teamwork Questionnaire* and *The State-Trait Anxiety Inventory for Children (STAIC)*.

Study findings: A statistically significant correlation was found between gender and state-anxiety levels ($r = 0.254$, $p < 0.05$), and trait-anxiety levels ($r = 0.323$, $p < 0.01$), and the level of self-discovery as a result of social interaction ($r = -0.265$; $p < 0.05$). Persons with low levels of self-discovery, concerning especially the determination of their preference for teamwork, achieved high scores in state-anxiety (37.5%). The obtained results prove that schoolchildren with high levels of trait-anxiety, and, consequently, state-anxiety, do not prefer teamwork. The proposed hypothesis was confirmed by the results of the study.

Key words: self-efficacy in teamwork, trait-anxiety, state-anxiety, task situations, lower-secondary school children.

Anxiety is the best known and probably the most prevalent emotion. Anxiety and fear are often used interchangeably, even though their referents are not the same, as noted by Rachman (1998, cited in Jackson, 2010, pp. 40). Biologists argue that emotions developed in prehistoric man to aid cooperation in a group and support social interactions (Bond, 2015, p. 268, Vetulani, Mazurek, 2015, pp. 28–29). We need emotions to survive, as they help us avert immediate danger in fight or flight situations. Anxiety is also considered as a mechanism which facilitates integration between the individual and the group through the gradual overcoming of one's own fears and learning new skills (Leary, Kowalski, 2001, pp. 34–36).

This interest in the problem of anxiety has led to the development of new concepts of anxiety. The distinction between different meanings of anxiety as a state and as a trait was introduced by R.B. Cattell and J.H. Scheier (as cited in T. Sosnowski, 1977, pp. 349–350). A similar distinction was made by M. Zuckerman (1960). In 1966, Charles D. Spielberger presented a theoretical outline of his concept of anxiety as a state and as a trait. The concept suggested that anxiety, as a state, had two aspects – a conscious feeling of anxiety, and the associated physiological/behavioural symptoms. The notion of anxiety as a trait emphasises the fact that the anxiety trait relates to relatively fixed individual differences. The measurement of this trait is static in nature. Anxiety as a trait determines how prone an individual is to respond by getting into a state of anxiety. Therefore, knowledge about how pronounced the anxiety trait is helps to anticipate the severity of the anxiety state, in which the individual finds himself/herself in response to a specific situation (Sosnowski, 1977, p. 350). This concept by Spielberger was supplemented and elaborated on by Norman S. Endler (1974), a Canadian psychologist, who defined the state of anxiety as an interaction between personality and situational factors. Endler argued that the situations that provoke anxiety include:
  – *ego*-threatening situations (interpersonal situations),
  – physically threatening situations,
  – ambiguous and unclear situations.

The analysis of data from the Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC) project, in which 800 children were surveyed, and 153 schoolchildren and 30 teachers were interviewed, showed that the overwhelming majority of the surveyed children exhibited anxiety, especially during exams (Carolyn Jackson 2010, p. 42). Psychologists have identified two aspects of such emotions: 1) the cognitive element, associated with worrying and negative thoughts (McDonald, 2001, as cited in Jackson, 2010, p. 42), and 2) emotionality, understood as the

subjective perception of physiological stimulation, manifesting itself through a racing pulse or sweaty hands (Putwain, 2007, as cited in Jackson, 2010, p. 42). Schoolchildren do not only fear tests or poor grades. It is also important to note their fear of being unpopular or marginalised. Girls in particular fear exclusion and being left out. During adolescence, teenagers usually experience anxiety about being rejected by their peer group (Kendall, 2012, p. 107). This, in turn, arouses destructive emotions. Being 'cool' can mean not being involved in hard work or effort that produces achievement (Jackson, 2010, p. 48). This also involves a lack of interest in teamwork.

The levels of trait-anxiety and state-anxiety among children and teenagers grow with age. This increase in state-anxiety over time suggests that, as an institution, school causes greater fear in older schoolchildren compared to younger ones (A. Jaworowska, 2005, p. 14). Novel, or challenging, situations make schoolchildren uneasy, with their minds going blank, leaving them apathetic or irritated. As a result, their thinking can be distorted in some ways (Bryńska 2005, p. 150):

- Exaggerating negative aspects of events and making sweeping generalisations (*"I'm worthless"*).
- Anticipating failure (*"What if I can't improve my grades? I will have to repeat the year and I'll never have a good job when I grow up"*).
- Selective attention – noticing mainly those aspects of a situation that can be associated with imminent danger. These cognitive distortions, as a fixed way of assessing various situations, contribute to sustained anxiety responses. They might be caused by critical comments about oneself or the attitudes of the so-called significant others (parents, teachers, guardians) (Bryńska, 2005, p. 150).

Lower-secondary school children usually associate stress in their life with learning, e.g. pop quizzes, tests, and oral quizzes. Such children feel under pressure from the external world, meaning both their peers and adults. This causes them to seek acceptance that will allow them to be themselves and provide them with a sense of security (Report: *Kim jest współczesny gimnazjalista* (*Who the contemporary lower-secondary school child is*), http://www.eksoc.uni.lodz.pl/is/doc/gimnazjalista.pdf, pp.78–79). Peers are for young people what we call a social mirror, one that allows young people to reflect on themselves in comparison to the group. When the individual is searching for their identity and comparing their attractiveness to the group, its members are those who can provide support and guidance in defining the individual's role in the group and their system of values (Shaffer, 2005, pp. 357–358). This is particularly important in

situations that are typical of a classroom, where children spend most of their time, form friendships, and take different roles, including that of team member.

As reported by Graham Russell and Steve Shaw (2009, p. 198), social anxiety is the third-most prevalent cause of damage to mental health, following depression and alcohol abuse. Using the Liebowitz Social Anxiety Scale, Olivares et al. (2009, p. 488), conducted research among students of seven departments of a large university and its partner upper-secondary schools. The research tool comprises four sub-scales, related to fear of relations, relation avoidance, fear of achievement and achievement avoidance. It was designed for young people aged 10 to 17. In order to be attractive for their prospective employers, UK students are expected to have some personal skills. These include the ability to communicate effectively with their peers. Therefore, universities promote empowerment methods designed for groups. A wide range of techniques used for teamwork (Łukasik, Witek, 2015) can be an issue for persons with acute social anxiety, and might lead to their poorer performance (Robotham, Julian, 2006, as cited in Russell, Shaw, 2009, p. 199). Nearly 10% of the surveyed students received results suggesting very high levels of social anxiety (ibid., p. 204). There is a high probability that these students would be reluctant to work in a team.

Being left out or excluded is always painful. It contributes to such experiences as anxiety, depression, anger, and shame (McDonald, Leary, 2005, as cited in Newman et al., 2007, p. 241). Affiliation with a group determines one's behaviour. Close relationships with peers show positive correlation with popularity and good reputation (Cauce, 1986), self-esteem (McGuire, Weis, 1982) and psycho-social adaptation (Buhrmester, 1990, as cited in Newman et al., 2007, p. 242). It needs to be noted that there are three possible approaches to affiliation: 1) belonging in a group as a means of identification with the social milieu, affiliation, identification, 2) the affective aspect comprising feelings, especially important for girls, who form close friendships during that time, 3) the importance of affiliation with a group (Newman et al. 2007, pp. 242–243). It is crucial to strongly emphasise the importance for mental health of affiliation to a group. Using the State Trait Anxiety Inventory, Weronika Juroszek studied the emotional and cognitive consequences of depreciating and favouring self-representation in young people with either high or low levels of social anxiety. The study showed that socially anxious persons tend to deprecate themselves more than the non-anxious ones, but only in failure situations. Admittedly, as concluded by Juroszek (2010, p. 106), persons with high levels of social anxiety generate more negative self-representations compared to persons with low social anxiety, but failure is still a depreciating factor for them. Probably, such

persons have less effective defence mechanisms in place. An experiment by J.D. Huppert et al. (2003, as cited in Juroszek, 2010, p. 106) confirms that persons with high levels of social anxiety focus excessively on negative situations. In addition, they tend to perceive such situations as more threatening. Girls with high levels of anxiety have been found to be more likely to perceive themselves in negative terms. Mandal (2004, as cited in Juroszek, 2010, p. 109) argues that females are more likely to appreciate relationships with other people, while males tend to focus on work and objects. In persons with high dispositional anxiety, situational social anxiety increased only following favouring self-presentation in success situations. High levels of social anxiety correlate with poor self-esteem. As a result, situations where subjects receive feedback from their milieu in the form of an acknowledgement of their good self-presentation, are inconsistent with their self-image. This causes tension and triggers self-criticism. Therefore, it is worth considering whether persons with high levels of situational anxiety, seeing a social mirror in an action group, would prefer not to take action/part. Forced to act, they will feel better if they do not achieve spectacular success. In the face of failure, when their participation has not brought the group much benefit, they hold on to their belief about their lack of skills or knowledge. For them, success is difficult to explain and triggers cognitive dissonance to restore the rather negative self-image (Leary, Kowalski, 2001, pp. 156–157).

The literature on the subject provides multiple examples of group cohesion's being developed by specific behaviour on the part of group members: social identity (identification), trust, reciprocity and loyalty (Bruhn, 2011, p. 180). Persons with deep social anxiety can have problems with any of these. They might refrain from manifesting their loyalty towards and trust in other team members, because instead of "social glue" they anticipate criticism and negative comments. Expectations might be different, so trust and reciprocity can hardly be built, as persons with strong anxiety are likely to consider their personal resources poorly. Loyalty, which helps to achieve goals and objectives in cooperation with others, can also be an issue. Persons with high levels of anxiety might interpret all encouragement to engage in joint action as insincere.

Research methodology

This study is based on Spielberger's concept of anxiety, which builds on Cattell and Scheier's considerations concerning the distinction between currently experienced anxiety and anxiety perceived as a fixed personality trait

(Jaworowska, 2005, p. 4). Reference is also made to the Social Cognitive Theory by Albert Bandura, who identified the concept of self-efficacy (Bandura, 2007; Chomczyńska-Rubacha, Rubacha, 2007; Juczyński, 2001). This study focuses on the problem of self-efficacy in relation to teamwork, and the functioning of individuals within groups with different levels of state-anxiety and trait-anxiety.

Its goal was to identify the relationship between self-efficacy in relation to teamwork and the level of anxiety considered as either a state or a trait (defined as a relatively fixed disposition). Based on the research procedure, these variables and their indicators were identified:

- the dependent variable – self-efficacy in cooperation with a group (indicated by the result obtained in a survey based on the Self-Efficacy in Teamwork Questionnaire developed by I. Łukasik),
- the independent variable – a level of anxiety considered either as a state or a fixed disposition, as indicated by the results obtained in a survey based on the State-Trait Anxiety Inventory for Children (STAIC) by C.D. Spielberger, C.D. Edwards, R.E. Lushene, J. Montuori, and D. Plazek.

Hypothesis

Persons with high levels of both trait-anxiety and state-anxiety are reluctant to work in groups.

The study used two tools:

- *The Self-Efficacy in Teamwork Questionnaire*, a standardised research tool (Łukasik, 2013, p. 291). The questionnaire contains 18 items for diagnosing the likelihood of the appearance of any of the three behaviours associated with teamwork. Scale One: involvement in the activity and resource sharing, is made up of seven items (3, 4, 8, 15, 16, 17, 18); Scale Two: activity planning and time management, comprises six (2, 6, 7, 10, 11, 14); and Scale Three: self-discovery as a result of social interaction, includes five (1, **5**, 9, 12, **13**)[1]. The overall score is the sum of points achieved on the three scales, and ranges from 18 to 72 points. The subjects are asked to choose from four answers in each item: *yes*, *generally yes*, *generally no*, and *no*. The diagnostic validity of the test is r = 0.846, p <0.01. The reliability calculated on the basis of Spearman-

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[1] When calculating results for answers to Questions 5 and 13, the numbers are to be reversed (4 = 1, 3 = 2, 2 = 3, 1 = 4).

-Brown's formula for the test as a whole is 0.8, with 0.9 for the first scale, 0.83 for the second, and 0.74 for the third.

Interpretation of results
sten 7–10 – high score
sten 6–5 – average score
sten 4–1 – low score

– *The State-Trait Anxiety Inventory for Children* (STAIC), developed by C.D. Spielberger, C.D. Edwards, R.E. Lushene, J. Montuori and D. Plat-zek, for short known as the Spielberger Anxiety Scale. Made up of 40 items, the scale is designed to measure anxiety on two levels: as a cur-rently experienced emotional state and as a character trait. The STA-IC not only measures the intensity of the anxiety during the test, but also helps to determine how likely a child is to experience anxiety in stressful situations. This, in turn, makes it possible to forecast a child's performance in school and to plan preventive measures. The State-Trait Anxiety Inventory comprises two parts, each with 20 closed-ended qu-estions. During the first part, children answer questions to describe their mood during the test. During the second part, they answer questions concerning their usual frame of mind. The STAIC can be used to survey whole groups of children, which makes it a handy tool for designing pre-ventive measures and for screening purposes. The study used the Polish version of the scale with defined norms[2].

Study results

The study covered 66 lower-secondary school children from two schools in Lublin, Poland, including 42 girls and 24 boys aged thirteen to fourteen.

Table 1. The overall score concerning self-efficacy in teamwork, N = 66

Score	Number of persons	Percentage
Low	19	24.3
Average	29	43.9

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[2] A. Jaworowska, *Inwentarz Stanu i Cechy Lęku dla Dzieci STAIC C.D.* Spielbergera, C.D. Edwardsa, R.E. Lushene'a, J. Montuoriego, D. Platzek. Podręcznik (Handbook), PTP, Warsaw 2005, p. 4.

Table 1. The overall score concerning self-efficacy in teamwork, N = 66

Score	Number of persons	Percentage
High	21	31.8
Total	66	100.0
χ^2 (1, N = 66) = 3.909; n.i. (not significant)		

The results of the chi-square test proved statistically insignificant. There is no statistically significant difference between the observed and expected distributions. Nearly half the subjects declared average self-efficacy in teamwork, one in four low self-efficacy, and approx. one in three high self-efficacy.

Table 2. Scores concerning involvement and resource-sharing (Factor 1 – Z), N = 66

Score	Number of persons	Percentage
Low	30	45.4
Average	18	27.3
High	18	27.3
Total	66	100.0
χ^2 (1, N = 66) = 4.364; n.i.*		

The majority of persons (nearly half the subjects) declared low involvement in teamwork and resource-sharing with its team members. Average and high scores each represented more than 25%.

Table 3. Scores concerning action planning and time management (Factor 2 – P), N = 66

Score	Number of persons	Percentage
Low	9	13.6
Average	22	33.3
High	35	53.1
Total	66	100.0
χ^2 (1, N = 66) = 15.364; p <0.01		

The largest group was represented by subjects with high scores in planning and time management (53.1%). Average skills in this area were observed in

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* χ^2 in the remaining tables indicates whether there is a statistically significant difference between the observed and expected distributions.

30% of the children. Persons characterised by low scores in action planning and time management represented 13.6% of the group.

Table 4. Scores concerning self-discovery as a result of social interaction (Factor 3 – S), N = 66

Score	Number of persons	Percentage
Low	20	30.3
Average	20	30.3
High	26	39.4
Total	66	29
$\chi2$ (1, N = 66) = 1.091; n.i.		

High scores proved slightly more frequent (39.4%), while low (30.3%) and average (30.3%) scores were at the same level.

Tables 5 and 6 below show the scores obtained by lower-secondary school children in respect of experienced anxiety.

Table 5. Scores obtained in C 1 STAIC (state-anxiety), N = 66

Score	Number of persons	Percentage
Low	2	3.0
Average	24	36.4
High	40	60.6
Total	66	100.0
$\chi2$ (1, N = 66) = 33.071; p <0.01		

The number of cases with low state-anxiety was lower than expected. The majority of the surveyed schoolchildren achieved high (60.6%) scores and one in three had the average score (36.4%).

Table 6. Scores obtained in C 2 STAIC (trait-anxiety), N = 66

Score	Number of persons	Percentage
Low	26	39.4
Average	22	33.3
High	18	27.3
Total	66	100.0
$\chi2$ (1, N = 66) = 1.455; n.i.		

Most subjects (39.4%) declared low levels of anxiety considered as a trait, with 33.3% reporting average levels, and 27.3% high levels.

A statistically significant correlation was found between gender and state-anxiety levels (r = 0.254, p <0.05), and gender and trait-anxiety levels (r = 0.323, p <0.01) with N = 66. There is also a statistically significant correlation between the gender of the subjects and their levels of self-discovery as a result of social interaction (r = -0.265; p <0.05).

In order to determine the significance of the relationship between the level of self-discovery as a result of social interaction and the level of state-anxiety, the chi-square test of independence was conducted for the two variables. The significant result of the test caused the rejection of the null hypothesis and the adoption of an alternative hypothesis stipulating a significant relationship between the assessed variables χ^2 (4, N = 66) = 9.846; p <0.05. The strength of the relationship between the analysed variables measured statistically is φ = 0.386; p <0.05. Persons with low levels of self-discovery, concerning especially the determination of their preference for teamwork, achieved high scores in state-anxiety (37.5%), with persons who preferred teamwork and obtained high scores in state-anxiety representing 18.2% of the subjects.

Statistical significance was also observed for the result of the test of the independence of the two variables, i.e., the level of self-discovery as a result of social interaction and the level of trait-anxiety, with χ^2 (4, N = 66) = 9.803; p <0.05 (relationship strength φ = 0.385; p <0.05).

Discussion

Anxiety accompanies many stages in human development, and this experience serves to teach increasingly greater emotional control and independence in managing various situations in everyday life. However, there are situations where anxiety hampers growth. This occurs when excessive anxiety is prolonged, and, instead of becoming stronger, a young person retreats into his or her shell. The more he/she is afraid of something, the more this becomes difficult to overcome, facilitating withdrawal, e.g., from group interactions. This can result, for instance, in escaping into the virtual world, Internet addiction, and, consequently, cause a decrease in the perceived meaning of life (Mastalerz, 2015, pp. 6–7).

A study conducted by Hanna Dąbrowska-Król (2006, p. 45) on adaptation problems in first-year lower-secondary school children, shows that most boys (70.66%) perceive lower-secondary school in negative terms. The subjects usually complained about teachers, older students and excessive workload. Girls

reported less problems, with about half of them (53.3%) having a negative image of lower-secondary school in relation to teachers, tests and excessive workload. Anxiety symptoms reported by schoolchildren generally included stomach pains, a bad frame of mind in the morning, a bad mood after returning from school, changes in their behaviour, and sleep and eating disorders. Asked about assistance available to them in their new school, they said they could count on support from their parents (53.3% of girls and 58.8% of boys), peers (49% of schoolchildren), and form teachers (21.9% of schoolchildren).

Schoolchildren are expected not only to fulfil school requirements, but also, what is equally important, to perform well in social interactions (Konarzewski 1992; Kwieciński 2013; as cited in Farnicka et al., 2016, p. 23). Farnicka et al. noted that in order to adjust to school correctly schoolchildren needed an appropriate level of self-esteem and self-confidence. In order to be able to face the challenges and expectations of the social milieu at school, one needs to have a sense of well-being and acceptance within a group. In late 2013/early 2014, a study was conducted in one of the primary schools in Poland on groups of 35 to 47 persons. The study used, i.a., the SUPSO Questionnaire for anxiety- and depression-level assessment, and the ASL Questionnaire of School Life for measuring the sense of well-being, exclusion and peer support. The results obtained for grades 2–5 showed a relationship between anxiety and age, $r = 0.18$; $p < 0.05$. An increase in school requirements is likely to exacerbate anxiety. Anxiety proved to correlate with sadness and negatively with self-confidence ($r = -0.483$; $p < 0.01$). The greater the anxiety, the greater the sadness and the poorer the self-confidence (Farnicka et al., 2016, p. 26). Albert Bandura (1997, as cited in Farnicka et al., 2016, p. 29) coined the term "perceived self-efficacy" to refer to a moment that is particularly difficult for self-assessment and self-confidence, the period of experiences associated with early school education. Turska (2013) argues that there is a decrease in self-efficacy around the age of 10, but it can also be observed after the age of 12. This fact can be associated with an increase in realism, the emergence of social comparison among peers, the determination of skill as a fixed trait, and the transition to highly demanding depersonalised education. This is accompanied by anxiety connected with the need to adapt to these new circumstances (Farnicka et al., 2016, p. 29). At this point, children either deploy strategies designed to complete the task at hand (Łagocka, Farnicka, 2013; Tuohy, 2002, as cited in Farnicka et al., 2016, p. 29), or use avoidance strategies in the face of emotional or behavioural problems (Mazur 1998; Nurmi 2012, as cited in Farnicka et al. 2016, p. 29). If school experiences during that time are not satisfactory, children might develop a lack of

faith in their self-efficacy. Therefore, it can be argued that the presence of anxiety associated with school performance can hinder involvement in teamwork.

This study used the STAIC Scale to assess the level of anxiety, and the Self-Efficacy in Teamwork Questionnaire to determine teamwork efficacy. A significant relationship was identified between the variables. Persons with high levels of trait-anxiety, and, consequently, state-anxiety, were found not to prefer teamwork. Therefore, the proposed hypothesis was confirmed. When the individual with a high level of trait-anxiety is constantly on the lookout for signs of danger, they tend to experience negative emotions (Kolańczyk 2003; Sosnowski 1997). Teamwork can be perceived as a threat due to the associated uncertainty and the need to reveal one's resources, which the individual is uncertain about.

Self-efficacy can serve as a buffer against school failures or anxiety, and supports efforts associated with learning towards better performance, and facilitates stress management (Talik, Król, 2014, p. 87). Individuals with high levels of anxiety, and also high self-efficacy, tend to use problem-oriented strategies, which allows them to achieve satisfactory results. Schoolchildren who experience anxiety (measured using the School Anxiety Questionnaire by L. Czyżniejewska and G. Kopinke) were more likely to use emotion-based strategies when faced with stress (Talik, Król, 2014, p. 91). However, Talik and Król did not identify any direct relationship between self-efficacy and the level of school anxiety.

This study referred to specific self-efficacy concerning teamwork and to anxiety not associated with any particular area, but rather a personality trait – neuroticism. No relationship was found between the variables. A significant correlation that was observed concerned the issue of willingness to engage in teamwork. Individuals with high levels of both trait-anxiety and state-anxiety did not prefer group work. It needs to be concluded that the anxiety identified by the STAIC is social in nature. Even interactions with group members in situations when teamwork is required, for example, in the classroom as part of a task assigned to schoolchildren by the teacher, might pose a problem.

Adolescents look for answers to some questions that are relevant for them, and seek their own identity and guidance in life. This is easier when young persons have their own group of reference. It is their peer group that provides teenagers with a greater chance of developing the skills required for everyday functioning. Furthermore, peer groups, due to the acceptance and friendship they can offer, often provide comfort and protection against the negative effects of difficult situations connected with school or family (Sokołowska, 2015, p. 16).

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