



# Examining Teachers' Trait, State and Cursive Handwriting Anxiety

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## Abstract

This study examines whether the trait and state anxiety and cursive handwriting anxiety of teachers differs according to assorted variables. The study group for this research project is composed of 381 teachers from the city of Burdur and the district centre of Bucak, Turkey. Of these participants, 44% were female and 56% were male. As for the subject taught, 57.7% were primary school teachers while 42.3% taught various other subjects. In the study, the State, Trait Inventory and Cursive Handwriting Anxiety Scale was used. The results of the study illustrate that the scores of state, trait anxiety and cursive handwriting anxiety do not differ according to the teachers' gender. It was determined that teachers' trait, state, inspection, inner anxiety scores and total scores of cursive handwriting anxiety differ in relation of the branches in which they teach; teachers' inspection, inner anxiety scores and total score of cursive handwriting anxiety varied in terms of the number of years they had been teaching; and teachers' average scores of trait and inner anxiety differed significantly in terms of their age. Furthermore, this study established that there is a positive and significant relationship between trait, state anxiety and cursive handwriting anxiety scores of teachers. In addition, gender, branch, age and cursive handwriting anxiety are significant predictors of trait anxiety as branch, age and cursive handwriting anxiety are significant predictors of state anxiety. Consequently, the study uncovered that teachers are generally anxious. Information studies may prove useful to determine how teacher anxieties can be reduced prior to anxiety inducing circumstances, such as program change.

## Key Words

Anxiety, Cursive Handwriting, Cursive Handwriting Anxiety, Trait and State Anxiety.

“Anxiety is a prolonged, complex emotional state that occurs when a person anticipates that some future situation, event or circumstance may involve a personally distressing, unpredictable and

uncontrollable threat to his or her vital interests.” (Clark & Beck, 2012). In essence, anxiety is when an individual considers him or herself inadequate in a threatening, or challenging environment. Anxiety

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is not directly caused by events; on the contrary, it consists of the irrational beliefs that individuals hold that can cause anxiety. Therefore, the meaning imposed on the specific situation is important (Wilde, 1995). The experience of anxiety, however, is not unidimensional and is highly complex. Feelings of anxiety appear to have significant differences from person to person, as well as from one time to another in the same person (McReynolds, 1976).

When the theoretical framework on anxiety is studied according to Spielberger et al., anxiety can be divided into two main components that have been defined as trait and state anxiety. Trait anxiety is defined as the inclination of an individual toward being anxious and state anxiety is defined as the subjective fear that an individual feels because of the circumstance in which he or she exists (Spielberger et al., 1970 as cited in Öner & LeCompte, 1983). While Özgüven (1994) has defined trait anxiety as the perception of a stressful situation that could be either dangerous or threatening with increasing and more continual frequency and situational emotional reactions, he defines state anxiety as temporary emotional reactions, which an individual shows to discontinuous circumstances, the amount of which change from one situation to another. Both trait and state anxiety are linked to specific situational characteristics by perceptual and cognitive appraisal processes (Schwarzer, Van der Ploeg, & Spielberger, 1982, p. 3).

Anxiety, which unless experienced intensively, is a normal human emotion that can cause undesirable results in an individual's life in various cases (Eisen & Kearney, 1995). Indications in individuals who experience continuous anxiety include behaviors such as a decline in one's academic, performance, an inability to concentrate on one's lessons, avoidance of personal relationships and social surroundings, failure, and a tendency toward introversion. In addition, sensitivity to an experience of intense anxiety can be the catalyst of an anxiety disorder in an individual's future (Weems, Taylor, Marks, & Varela, 2010). Anxiety is also defined as a psychological mood described by physical symptoms of tension from strong negative feelings of prospective dangers and the expectation of disaster. Although experiencing anxiety may have positive effects from time to time, an excessive amount of uncontrolled anxiety renders an individual weak, thereby limiting his/her capabilities (Mash & Wolfe, 2002).

Writing is a motoric production process of symbols and signs necessary to express feelings and thoughts

(Akyol, 2009); it is a strong tool (Graham, 2007). Several important tasks are assigned to teachers in the teaching of cursive handwriting, which are to be continually used by students. The teacher must be a model to his/her students by writing accurately and clearly in cursive handwriting. However, according to studies performed in both the United States and the United Kingdom, only half or less than half of all teachers are determined to have received sufficient training on how to teach handwriting (Barnett, Stainthorp, Henderson, & Scheib, 2006; Graham et al., 2008; Zaner-Bloser, 1993 as cited in Graham & Weintraub, 1996).

In Turkey, it has been observed that the lesson on "teaching handwriting" exists only in the curriculums of Primary School Teaching and Turkish Education Teaching (Kavak, Aydın, & Altun, 2007). Even though primary school teachers have received training in teaching cursive handwriting, they may still experience difficulty writing in cursive script. Yıldız, Yıldırım, and Ateş (2009), in their applied study in which they analyzed primary school teachers' handwriting on classroom boards, observed a number of problems present in teachers' handwriting. In this regard Turan and Akpınar (2008), Yıldırım (2008), Durukan and Alver (2008), Turan, Gözler, and Erdoğan (2007), Kazu and Ersözlü (2006), Acat and Özsoy (2006) revealed that primary school teachers lacked sufficient knowledge of cursive handwriting. Arslan and Ilgın (2010), on the other hand, revealed that branch teachers lacked enough information on cursive handwriting. Apart from these studies, Yıldırım and Ateş (2010) determined that primary school teachers considered themselves to be adequate in cursive handwriting.

In the literature, both trait and state anxiety have been studied in terms of a number of related variables. In the studies concerned, anxiety was observed within different age groups depending on many variables; among them gender (Alisinanoğlu & Uluğtaş, 2000; Aslan, 2009; Coşkun & Günbey, 2009; Develi, 2006; Ensari, 2000; Karataş, 2011; Kartopu, 2012; Ngidi & Silbaya, 2003; Özyürek & Demiray, 2010; Teixeira et al., 2012; Weiser et al., 1991), age (Alisinanoğlu & Uluğtaş, 2000; Aslan, 2009; Kartopu, 2012; Özyürek & Demiray, 2010), attitudes of parents, educational status of parents, occupation of parents, number of siblings (Alisinanoğlu & Uluğtaş, 2000), educational status of the mother, socio-economic status (Alisinanoğlu & Uluğtaş, 2000; Coşkun & Günbey, 2009), grade (Karataş, 2011), social insurance of family, age of mother (Coşkun &

Günbey, 2009), scholastic aptitudes (Teixeira et al., 2012) academic achievement (Alisinanoğlu & Uluğtaş, 2000; Sharma, Dang, & Spielberger, 1986), cultural difference (Sharma et al., 1986; Weiser et al., 1991), marital status (Güner, 2008; Kartopu, 2012), number of years teaching (Aslan, 2009; Develi, 2006; Güner, 2008), and branch (Aslan, 2009; Güner, 2008). Influenced by these studies, the current study examines trait-state anxiety of teachers according to gender, age, branch and number of years teaching.

As the relationship between trait and state anxiety has been studied as mentioned above, this study also seeks to examine the relationship between cursive handwriting anxiety and trait-state anxiety. Whether anxiety has a relationship with the social support perceptions of mothers of children with disabilities (Coşkun & Günbey, 2009), problem-solving abilities of children staying in student lodgings (Karataş, 2011), adolescents staying at home or at a boarding school while attending secondary school (Özyürek & Demiray, 2010), adults participating in physical activities, depression (Teixeira et al., 2012), attitudes of teachers and their intimidation (Ensari, 2000), cheating of young adults (Weiser et al., 1991), situations of parachute training (Endler, Crooks, & Parker, 1992), a teacher candidates' anxiety about teaching and self-esteem (Cheung & Hui, 2011) students achievements (Papay & Spielberger, 1986) self-concept (Biaggio, Crano, & Crano, 1986), age (Develi, 2006), reflective thinking (Aslan, 2009), and the tendency to postpone (Güner, 2008) are all topics that have been investigated in previous works. These studies have provided insight into the current study.

The studies on cursive handwriting are observed to be related to teachers' opinions (Acat & Özsoy, 2006; Başaran, 2006; Bayraktar, 2006; Bektaş, 2007; Duran & Akyol, 2010; Durukan & Alver, 2008; Graham et al., 2008; Hammerschmidt & Sudsawad, 2004; Kazu & Ersözülü, 2006; Turan, 2010; Turan & Akpınar, 2008; Turan et al., 2007; Yıldırım, 2008; Yurduseven, 2007), teachers and students' opinions (Arslan & İlgin, 2010), the legibility of students' handwriting (Erdoğan, 2012; Roston, Hinojosa, & Kaplan, 2008; Yıldız & Ateş, 2010), and the legibility of teachers' handwriting (Yıldız et al., 2009). It has also been noticed that studies of anxiety performed in the field of writing investigate anxiety about writing (Karakaya & Ülper, 2011; Özbay & Zorba, 2011; Yaman, 2010).

There are a number of studies that investigate the effect of trait and state anxiety on cursive handwriting; however, the number is limited and there are no studies on anxiety about cursive handwriting. With this in mind, the purpose of the present study is to determine whether a teacher's trait, situational, and cursive handwriting anxiety vary by gender, age, branch, and number of years teaching. Another goal of this study is to determine whether the dummy variables of gender, age, branch, number of years teaching and cursive handwriting anxiety may be used to predict both trait and state anxiety.

## Method

This study is a relational screening model (Karasar, 2005) that examines the trait, state and cursive handwriting anxiety of teachers, which differs according to some variables.

## Participants

The study group is composed of 381 teachers working in the city of Burdur and the district center of Bucak. Of the teachers who attended the study, 44% of them were women and 56% of them were men.

## Instruments

**The State - Trait Anxiety Inventory (STAI):** In this study to determine teachers' "trait and state" anxiety levels, a State and Trait Anxiety Inventory, developed by Spielberger and adopted into Turkish by Öner and LeCompte (1983) and Öner (1997) was used. In this study, the Cronbach alpha internal consistency coefficient was found as .68 for the trait anxiety scale and as .65 for the state anxiety scale.

**The Cursive Handwriting Anxiety Scale for Teachers:** The Cursive handwriting anxiety scale for teachers that was developed by Arslan and Karataş (2012) to determine teachers' anxiety regarding cursive handwriting, was used in the study. The scale was composed of 25 items, three of which were reverse and two of which were direct items. The high scores taken from the scale shows that there is a high level of cursive handwriting anxiety. The Cronbach alpha internal consistency coefficient accounted for within the scope of the investigation was found to be .88 for cursive handwriting anxiety, .91 for inspection anxiety, .86 for the anxiety caused by students, .80 for inner

anxiety and .92 for all items of the scale. These values are accepted as a high reliability coefficient. The validity of the scale was made through the state anxiety scale (Öner & LeCompte, 1983) within the scope of the investigation. In the validity study performed with 300 teachers, a positive and significant relationship was found between the two scales ( $r = .215$ ;  $p < .001$ ).

Confirmatory factor analysis was used in order to test the structural validity of the scale. The fit indices of the model, which was obtained from confirmatory factor analysis, were studied and the Chi-square value was observed to be significant ( $\chi^2 = 902.13$ ,  $sd = 268$ ,  $p < .001$ ). The fit index values were found to be RMSEA = .089, NFI = .93, CFI = .95, IFI = .95, RFI = .92, GFI = .81, AGFI = .76, SRMR = .09. These fit index values show that the model produced an acceptable fit.

### Procedures

Trait and state anxiety inventory, cursive handwriting anxiety scale-teacher forms and personal information forms were given to teachers by investigators in the schools where they worked during April and May of the 2011-2012 academic year. All the participants in the study were volunteers.

### Data Analysis

An Independent Groups test was used to determine whether the teachers' scores of state and trait anxiety and cursive handwriting anxiety differed in terms of gender and branch of specialization. A One-way Analysis of Variance was used to investigate whether the teachers' scores of state and trait anxiety and cursive handwriting anxiety differed in terms of their year teaching and age. For one of the unequal groups, a Scheffe post hoc test was used (Kayri, 2009). The Pearson Product-Moment Correlation Coefficient was used to understand the relationship between trait and state anxiety and cursive handwriting scores. Stepwise Regression Analysis was used to see whether dummy variables, such as gender, branch, number of years teaching, age, and cursive handwriting anxiety scores significantly predicted trait and state anxiety scores. There was to be no relationship between error terms in the model, so as to provide the Regression assumption (Kalaycı, 2006). Accordingly, considering the Durbin Watson value used in testing autocorrelation in the model, it is

observed that the value, which was expected to be between 1.5 and 2.5 (Kalaycı, 2006), was 1.973 for trait anxiety and 1.908 for state anxiety. There was no auto-correlation in the model; the standard errors of b coefficients were very small and the regression assumption was provided. Dependent and independent variables in the regression analysis need to be at least continual variables measured in an equal interval scale and need to show normal distributions. However, in some investigations, the effects of independent variables included in the classification scale on dependent variable can also be examined. In the analysis, a classified variable can be included in the analysis by being turned into new (artificial) variable producing a missing level number (G -1), excluding one of its levels; it is also called "dummy" variable (Büyükoztürk, 2012). Discontinuous variables in this investigation (gender, branch, age, number of years teaching) were included in regression analysis after they were again defined as "dummy variables."

### Results

In this study, the investigation revealed that the trait-state anxiety and cursive handwriting anxiety levels of teachers did not differ in terms of their gender. However, the study found that teachers' trait, state, inspection, inner anxiety scores and total scores for cursive handwriting anxiety in terms of their branches changed significantly. Inspection, inner anxiety scores and their total scores for cursive handwriting anxiety in terms of the duration they have been teaching and trait and inner anxiety scores in terms of their ages also changed significantly. In addition, it was observed that the trait, state anxiety and cursive handwriting anxiety scores of the teachers have a significant relationship with one another. The investigation results showed that gender, branch, age and cursive handwriting anxiety are significant predictors of trait anxiety, and branch, age and cursive handwriting anxiety are significant predictors of state anxiety.

### Discussion

This study focuses on teachers' trait, state and cursive handwriting anxiety. It was found that the teacher's scores of trait, state anxiety and cursive handwriting anxiety did not differ significantly in terms of their gender. When the literature on this matter is taken into consideration, there are studies indicating that trait and state anxiety scores were different (Güz, Doğanay, & Güz, 2003; Karataş,

2011; Kaya & Varol, 2004; Özyürek & Demiray, 2010; Sekmenli, 2000), while there also studies suggesting that trait and state anxiety scores did not differ (Başaran, Taşğın, Sanioğlu, & Taşkın, 2009; Duman, 2008; Gürsoy, 2006). This contradictory situation can be accounted for by the assessment instruments used, the research group and the situation at the time.

It is observed that in terms a teacher's age, the scores of trait anxiety and inner anxiety changed significantly. However, their total score for cursive handwriting, inspection anxiety, cursive handwriting anxiety and state anxiety did not change significantly. It was discovered that the trait anxiety scores of those who are over 45 years of age are significantly higher than those who are between the ages of 25 and 34. In accordance with these results, it is seen that older teachers have higher anxiety than younger teachers. Contrary to this result, Develi (2006) found no relationship, and Güner (2008) found no difference, between trait anxiety and age. The reason for this result could be the features of the study group. When the inner anxiety sub-dimension of the cursive handwriting anxiety scale is examined, the investigation showed that the scores of the teachers between ages of 25 and 34 are significantly higher than those at 45 years old or more. According to the results of this research, teachers who are older and have more years of service have less inner anxiety.

Another result of the study is that teachers' in primary schools have significantly higher trait and state anxiety scores when compared to teachers from other branches. Inspection of teachers from other branches, in addition to inner anxiety scores and total scores for cursive handwriting anxiety were found to be significantly higher in comparison with primary school teachers. The research shows that the scores for state and trait anxiety of primary school teachers are meaningfully higher than the state-trait anxiety scores for teachers in other branches. The reason why primary teachers' level of state anxiety is high may be due to the fact that some primary school teachers are threatened with becoming redundant. As a result of the implementation of the 4+ 4+ 4 system, these teachers do not know which school they will be appointed to, as it is not clear how the new system will be applied and what it will bring. Van der berg and Ros (1999) suggest that it is normal for teachers to be anxious in view of innovation. On the other hand, this research showed that the teachers who are at the stage of institutionalization, accept

innovations better than those who are at the stage of practice, and the teachers at the stage of practice accept innovations better than those who are at the stage of adaptation. When considered in terms of cursive handwriting anxiety scores, on the other hand, it is observed that the other branch teachers' inspection, inner anxiety scores and total scores of cursive handwriting anxiety are significantly higher than elementary teachers' inspection, inner anxiety scores and total score of cursive handwriting anxiety. The reason for this may be that elementary teachers started using cursive handwriting due to the change in the curriculum in 2005, and they have become accustomed to using cursive handwriting. It was also determined in different research (Arslan & Ilgın, 2010) that the teachers in other branches have a problem with cursive handwriting and they cannot or do not want to write using this method. Additionally, when examining the teachers' branches, teachers who are between 25 and 34 years old are mostly the other branch teachers and those who are 45 years old or more are the elementary school teachers. The fact that the elementary school teachers are older, and have more experience accounts for why they possess lower inner anxiety, which is the sub-dimension of cursive handwriting anxiety.

The achievement in student handwriting is influenced by the handwriting instruction given in class and by the teachers' willingness to teach this particular skill, which includes whether or not the teacher enjoys teaching. All of these attitudes are related to the teacher's competence (Graham et al., 2008). On the other hand, some teachers do not find themselves competent (Acat & Özsoy, 2006; Arslan & Ilgın, 2006; Durukan & Alver, 2008; Barnett et al., 2006; Graham et al., 2008; Kuzu & Ersözülü, 2006; Turan & Akpınar, 2008; Turan et al., 2007; Yıldırım, 2008; Zaner-Bloser, 1993 as cited in Graham & Weintraub, 1996). According to the results of this research, cursive handwriting anxiety is high, especially amongst the young and teachers of other branches; interestingly, the teachers of other branches are comprised of mostly younger teachers. The reason why their cursive handwriting anxiety is high is that they do not consider themselves to be competent.

It is seen that in terms of the number of years teaching, teachers' inspection anxiety, inner anxiety and total point averages for cursive handwriting anxiety have become significantly different. Their point averages of state and trait anxiety points, cursive handwriting anxiety and the anxiety

stemming from students, on the other hand, have not differed. Develi (2006) also found out that trait anxiety did not differ according to the number of years teaching. Develi supports the result of this study. It was observed that those serving for 11-15 years have higher averages of inspection than those serving for 26 years or more. When considering the averages of inner anxiety scores, it was seen that those serving for 6-10 years have higher averages of inner anxiety points than those serving for 16-20, 21-15 and 26 years or more. In addition, when examined in terms of the total score for cursive handwriting anxiety, on the other hand, those serving for 11-15 years have higher averages of cursive handwriting anxiety than those serving for 26 years or more. According to the results of this research, teachers who have fewer years of teaching experience have higher cursive handwriting anxiety; teachers who have more years of teaching experience have less cursive handwriting anxiety.

In this study, a positive relationship was found among trait, state and cursive handwriting anxieties, which may mean that as teachers' trait and state anxieties increase, their cursive handwriting anxiety may increase, or with the increase of their cursive handwriting anxieties, their trait and state anxieties will increase. In literature, while the studies concerning the relationship of trait and state anxiety (Schwarzer et al., 1982) support the result of this study, there are no studies examining the relationship of trait, state anxiety and cursive handwriting anxiety because the cursive handwriting scale has just been developed.

The final result of the study established that gender, branch, age and cursive handwriting anxieties are significant predictors of trait anxiety, and branch, age and cursive handwriting anxieties are significant predictors of state anxiety. This result means that teachers' anxieties with regards

to gender, branch, age, number of years teaching and cursive handwriting affect their trait and state anxieties in general. While there are some studies in which state and trait anxieties are predicted by different variables (Çivitçi, 2006; Hacıömeroğlu, 2008), no studies have been found regarding cursive handwriting anxiety.

Teachers may feel anxiety while working for different reasons, like changes in the workplace. Teachers need to be supported before the changes occur. According to Rogers (1995 as cited in Akşit, 2007), it is useful for teachers to be provided with professional support within the school when accelerating a programme of innovations (Akşit, 2007). Thus, it can be ensured that teachers will be prepared for the coming changes. Furthermore, the humanitarian changes that teachers make in their daily lives cannot be understood if their beliefs, attitudes and feelings in the working atmosphere are not taken into account (Van den Berg, 2002). Therefore, this could also affect teacher performance.

According to the results of the research, the following suggestions can be made. This study showed that cursive handwriting anxiety levels changed according to the teachers' branches, number of years teaching and their anxieties related to their ages. Therefore, studies of what can be done to reduce their anxieties prior to the anxiety-inflicting circumstances (such as programme change) may be useful. It could also be helpful if intervention programmes are carried out to reduce teachers' cursive handwriting anxieties, particularly for the primary school teachers who have just entered the profession. If branch teachers were provided with handwriting education in small groups, it could also prove helpful. In upcoming studies, pre-service teachers' cursive handwriting can be checked and this can be compared to the teachers' cursive handwriting anxieties.

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