

Exam Anxiety in Romanian Students: A Preliminary Validation of the Westside Test Anxiety Scale

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Abstract. *Exam anxiety can influence academic performance, which requires the use of valid psychometric tools. This pilot study evaluated the test-retest reliability and linguistic equivalence of the Westside Test Anxiety Scale (WTAS) among Romanian students. The scale was translated and revised, and the questionnaire was administered online, in two stages, at an interval of two weeks, analyzing the data of 39 students who completed both administrations. The results indicated moderate to good reliability, with greater stability in the English version ($r = 0.516 - 0.763$) than in the Romanian version ($r = 0.495 - 0.873$), and linguistic equivalence was confirmed by high correlations between versions ($r = 0.565 - 0.928$). However, certain items in the Romanian version showed high variability, suggesting the need for a revision of the translation. This pilot research supports the use of WTAS in Romanian, but recommends adjustments for clarity, and future studies will target a larger sample and controlled administration, to obtain more robust data on the validity of the scale.*

Keywords: test anxiety, Westside Test Anxiety Scale, language equivalence, test-retest reliability, bilingual students, higher education.

Introduction

One of the topics often addressed in educational psychology is exam anxiety, which affects not only academic performance, but also students' motivation or even emotional well-being (Steinmayr et al., 2016). Some previous studies have highlighted the fact that high levels of anxiety can lead to cognitive blocks, decreased concentration capacity of students and even impaired working memory, aspects that can contribute to lower academic results (Umpierre-Soler, 2005). In this context, the analysis of this factor becomes a priority if one wants to identify and implement intervention strategies designed to support students in managing negative emotions associated with academic evaluation.

The Westside Test Anxiety Scale (WTAS) is one of the instruments used to measure test anxiety. It is an effective and easy-to-administer tool intended to assess the impact of anxiety on

performance and cognition (Driscoll, 2007). The tool presents the analysis of two main dimensions: one related to performance impairment and the other related to concern about testing (Driscoll, 2007). Although it is an internationally applied tool, as reflected by various studies (Robson et al., 2023), its application in a bilingual or multicultural context requires validation of linguistic equivalence and test-retest reliability, to ensure that the scale measures the same construct consistently, regardless of the language in which it is administered.

In Romania, there are few studies on measuring test anxiety with standardized instruments, and the use of WTAS in this population requires careful translation and adaptation. In addition, given the increasing number of students studying in English-taught programs, it becomes necessary to check the consistency between the English and Romanian versions of the scale. Thus, this research aims to evaluate the test-retest reliability and linguistic equivalence of WTAS, through a study conducted on Romanian students enrolled in programs taught in Romanian.

Specifically, this research pursues two main objectives:

1. To determine the test-retest reliability of the WTAS scale in its original English version and in the version translated into Romanian, by administering it at an interval of two weeks.
2. To evaluate the linguistic equivalence between the English and Romanian versions, by comparing the participants' responses to each of the two versions in the same test session.

This analysis will contribute to the validation of the use of WTAS in Romania, providing empirical data on its temporal stability and translation accuracy. The results will also facilitate the application of the scale to larger and more diverse samples, including students in international study programs, allowing for a more accurate measurement of test anxiety among young adults.

Introduction contains all the necessary ideas to introduce the reader in the topic of the paper and the research performed by the author. It shows the importance of the subject and the approach used by the author in dealing with it. It is necessary for the author to formulate clearly the research question and the main hypotheses considered in this research.

Literature review

Exam anxiety is an important factor influencing academic performance, affecting working memory, ability to concentrate, and self-confidence (Trifoni & Shahini, 2011; Orhan et al., 2022).

Recent studies have highlighted the effects of online exam proctoring on student anxiety and academic performance, highlighting the importance of including these factors in measuring test anxiety. Woldeab and Brothen (2019) demonstrated that students with a high level of trait anxiety score lower on online proctored exams, suggesting that these practices may amplify stress and influence academic performance. In a subsequent study, the authors looked at the impact of fear of being falsely accused of fraud and found that while this factor contributes to anxiety, it does not directly affect test performance, with overall anxiety being the main predictor of academic achievement (Woldeab & Brothen, 2021). More recently, Woldeab and Brothen (2023) highlighted that the accelerated transition to online education has increased reliance on digital proctoring, which has generated negative experiences for students, especially those with high anxiety as a trait. These studies highlight the need for a clear distinction between state anxiety and trait anxiety in online assessment contexts, suggesting that the tools used to measure test anxiety must also take into account contextual influences, such as digital surveillance.

To assess these phenomena, various psychometric tools have been developed, including the Westside Test Anxiety Scale (WTAS), which is one of the most widely used, due to its simplicity and efficiency in measuring worry and impact on performance (Driscoll, 2007).

The Westside Test Anxiety Scale is a 10-item tool that measures two main dimensions of exam anxiety: the impact of anxiety on performance and the degree of cognitive concern felt by students. Due to its simple format and quick applicability, WTAS is frequently used in the educational setting to assess the extent to which anxiety interferes with academic achievement. Compared to more complex instruments, such as the Test Anxiety Inventory (TAI) or the Cognitive Test Anxiety Scale (CTAS), this scale emphasizes the direct consequences of anxiety on performance, thus being an effective option for screening and rapid interventions among students (Driscoll, 2007).

When it comes to adapting an instrument into another language, it is necessary to check linguistic equivalence to ensure that the test measures the same construct consistently (Paraskevopoulos et al., 2024). Translation and cultural adaptation of tests requires rigorous methods, including translation-back-translation, semantic evaluation by experts, preliminary testing, test-retest application or even psychometric analysis (Silva et al., 2015). Another important aspect is the reliability of the test-retest, which indicates the stability of the responses over time (Macarie et al., 2008). In the case of academic anxiety tools, test-retest reliability is essential to confirm that the scale reflects a stable level of anxiety and not situational variations.

In the case of WTAS, previous studies have demonstrated its reliability in different cultures, (Robson et al., 2023), but it has not yet been validated in Romania. Given the increase in the number of Romanian students enrolled in English-taught programs, there is a need for a tool that can be used in both languages, while maintaining conceptual and psychometric consistency. This research explores the test-retest reliability and linguistic equivalence of WTAS in Romania, providing data needed for future studies on the measurement of academic anxiety in students. In this section, the author must provide the necessary background literature for explaining the state-of-the-art in the domain of the present research. The author should consider all significant references and make a synthesis of the different viewpoints expressed by different authors. Also, the author should provide the working definitions of the basic concepts used in the paper, and the main ideas, models or theories found in the literature related to the present research. The literature review should reveal the gap between the extant literature and the new perspective or model presented in the paper.

Methodology

This research aimed to evaluate the test-retest reliability and linguistic equivalence of the Westside Test Anxiety Scale through two important steps: (1) translation and adaptation of the scale into Romanian and (2) administration of the questionnaire in two test sessions, at an interval of two weeks. The data were collected from students from a university program in Romania, and the statistical analyses aimed at the stability of the answers and the coherence between the language versions.

Translation and adaptation of the scale

The items of the original scale in English have been translated and adapted for the Romanian linguistic and academic context. The revision of the translation was carried out by three Romanian university professors, with advanced competences in English, who analyzed the semantic equivalence and clarity of the wording. Based on their feedback, the final version of the scale in Romanian was obtained (Appendix 1).

Participants and administration procedure

The study was conducted on students from the Faculty of Entrepreneurship, Business Engineering and Management, focusing on the Engineering and Management program, bachelor's cycle, first and third years, within the specialization Engineering and Business Management taught in Romanian. Participation was voluntary, and students were informed that they could withdraw their participation at this research at any time.

The questionnaire was administered online, through Google Forms, and distributed through the group leaders. Each test session included two consecutive sections: (1) the English version and (2) the Romanian version, without the possibility of returning to the previous section. The first stage took place in the first week of semester 2, and the second stage after two weeks.

In the first stage, 96 students participated, and in the second, 124, but only 39 respondents completed both administrations and were included in the test-retest analysis.

Data analysis

The data was exported from Google Forms, centralized, encoded, and analyzed in IBM SPSS Statistics software (version 19). Four sets of Pearson correlations were performed to assess:

- Test-retest reliability for each version (English and Romanian).
- Linguistic equivalence between versions in Stage 1 and Stage 2.

These analyses allowed the investigation of the stability of the scale over time and the coherence between the original and the translated version, contributing to the validation of its use in Romanian.

Results and discussions

Linguistic equivalence between the English version (E) and the Romanian version (R) - Stage 1

To assess the linguistic equivalence of the Westside Test Anxiety Scale, the authors analyzed the correlations between the items in the English version (E) and those from the Romanian version (R), as completed by the participants in the first stage of the study. Basically, through this analysis, the authors wanted to test the extent to which the items in English and those in Romanian are equivalent when they are completed in the same session was pursued (Table 1).

Table 1. Correlations between items in English (E) and Romanian (R) in stage 1

Items in English (E)	Items in Romanian (R)	Pearson Coefficient	p value
E1.1	R1.1	.756**	p<0.01
E2.1	R2.1	.748**	p<0.01
E3.1	R3.1	.836**	p<0.01
E4.1	R4.1	.850**	p<0.01
E5.1	R5.1	.861**	p<0.01
E6.1	R6.1	.565**	p<0.01
E7.1	R7.1	.796**	p<0.01
E8.1	R8.1	.778**	p<0.01
E9.1	R9.1	.577**	p<0.01
E10.1	R10.1	.881**	p<0.01

Note: n=39, **. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

The Pearson correlation analysis indicated values between 0.565 and 0.881, all of which were statistically significant (p<0.01). These results suggest a good correspondence between the English and Romanian versions of the scale. The high correlations obtained for most of the items

($r > 0.700$, $p < 0.01$) support the hypothesis that the translated version of the scale (in Romanian) faithfully preserves the conceptual structure of the original English version. This result indicates that participants perceived and interpreted items in a similar way, regardless of the language in which they completed the test.

The highest correlation was observed between items E10.1 and R10.1 ($r = 0.881$, $p < 0.10$), which indicates a very good coherence of this item between versions (“I struggle with writing assignments or avoid them as long as I can. I feel that whatever I do will not be good enough.”). On the other hand, the lowest correlation was recorded for E6.1 and R6.1 ($r = 0.565$, $p < 0.06$), which may suggest a difference in the interpretation of this item between the two language versions (“I worry so much before a major exam that I am too worn out to do my best on the exam.”). This aspect could suggest the need for an additional verification of the consistency of the wording of item 6 in Romanian.

Overall, however, the analysis indicates a good linguistic equivalence between the versions of the scale, confirming that the Romanian translation largely reproduces the construct measured by the original version.

Linguistic equivalence between the English version (E) and the Romanian version (R) - Stage 2

To verify the stability of the linguistic equivalence of the *Westside Test Anxiety Scale* in the second administration, the authors analyzed the correlations between the items of the English version and those of the Romanian version in stage 2. If the results are like those in stage 1, it means that the English and Romanian versions are consistent and measure the same construct (Table 2).

Table 2. Correlations between items English (E) and Romanian (R) in stage 2

Items in Romanian, stage 1	Items in Romanian, stage 2	Pearson Coefficient	p value
E1.2	R1.2	.845**	$p < 0.01$
E2.2	R2.2	.902**	$p < 0.01$
E3.2	R3.2	.928**	$p < 0.01$
E4.2	R4.2	.792**	$p < 0.01$
E5.2	R5.2	.831**	$p < 0.01$
E6.2	R6.2	.826**	$p < 0.01$
E7.2	R7.2	.848**	$p < 0.01$
E8.2	R8.2	.678**	$p < 0.01$
E9.2	R9.2	.826**	$p < 0.01$
E10.2	R10.2	.856**	$p < 0.01$

Note: $n=39$, **. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

The Pearson correlation analysis indicated values between 0.678 and 0.928, all of which were statistically significant ($p < 0.01$). As most of the correlations are high ($r > 0.600$), it can be said that the translation of the scale into Romanian language is faithful to the original and that the participants perceive the items similarly regardless of the language in which they are formulated. The greatest correlation was observed between items E3.2 and R3.2 ($r = 0.928$, $p < 0.01$), suggesting that this item is very well translated and perceived in an almost identical way in both language versions (“During important exams, I think that I am doing awful or that I may fail.”). In contrast, the lowest correlation was recorded for E8.2 and R8.2 ($r = 0.678$, $p < 0.01$), indicating a slight

variation in the interpretation of this item between the two languages (“I find that my mind sometimes wanders when I am taking important exams.”).

The results obtained in stage 2 are even better than those obtained in stage 1, which indicates a strengthening of linguistic equivalence between administrations. This suggests that as participants become more familiar with the scale, their responses become more consistent between the English and Romanian versions.

Test-retest reliability of the scale in English version (E) in stage 1 and stage 2

To assess the stability over time of the *Westside Test Anxiety Scale* in English (E), the authors analyzed the Pearson correlations between participants' responses to the first administration (stage 1) and the second administration (stage 2), carried out at an interval of two weeks. This analysis measures the degree to which participants' responses remain stable over a short period of time, given that anxiety about exams is considered a relatively stable construct (Table 3).

Table 3. Correlations between items in English in stage 1 and stage 2

Items in English, stage 1	Items in English, stage 2	Pearson Coefficient	p value
E1.1	E1.2	.516**	p<0.01
E2.1	E2.2	.557**	p<0.01
E3.1	E3.2	.719**	p<0.01
E4.1	E4.2	.741**	p<0.01
E5.1	E5.2	.605**	p<0.01
E6.1	E6.2	.696**	p<0.01
E7.1	E7.2	.763**	p<0.01
E8.1	E8.2	.705**	p<0.01
E9.1	E9.2	.626**	p<0.01
E10.1	E10.2	.591**	p<0.01

Note: n=39, **. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

The results of the Pearson correlations indicate values between 0.516 and 0.763, all of which are statistically significant ($p<0.01$). These values suggest moderate to good test-retest reliability, indicating that participants answered items in a relatively consistent way, but there are also variations between certain questions.

The highest correlation was observed for E7.1 & E7.2 ($r=0.763$, $p<0.01$), suggesting a good consistency of responses for this item, indicating high stability in participants' perception of the measured size (“I feel out of sorts or not really myself when I take important exams”). On the other hand, the lowest correlation was recorded for E1.1 & E1.2 ($r=0.516$, $p<0.01$), suggesting that this item was less stable between the two administrations (“The closer I am to a major exam, the harder it is for me to concentrate on the material.”). This can be influenced by the actual approach of an exam, which could cause variations in responses depending on when the scale is administered.

Moreover, the lower values of the correlation coefficients can also be explained by the fact that the participants completed the scale at two different times, which may cause their stress levels to have varied, thus influencing the responses (the first stage was immediately after the beginning of semester 2, and the second stage was after 2 weeks, when they have already started to receive homework/tests/projects to be carried out). Thus, it is possible that in the second stage, receiving more work activities and getting closer to the mid-term exams, the students' perceived anxiety increased, changing the way the participants responded to the items. In addition, recent experiences

of participants with academic assignments could influence the results of certain items (such as in E10-"I struggle with writing assignments or avoid them as long as I can."), which would explain the instability of these items between stages. As for items E1 ("The closer I am to a major exam, the harder it is for me to concentrate on the material.") and E10 ("I struggle with writing assignments or avoid them as long as I can. I feel that whatever I do will not be good enough.") had the lowest correlations, it can be said that they are more sensitive to contextual influences and may require further verification of the wording.

Test-retest reliability of the scale in the Romanian version (R) in stage 1 and stage 2

To assess the stability over time of the Romanian version of the *Westside Test Anxiety Scale*, the authors analyzed the Pearson correlations between participants' responses to the first administration (stage 1) and the second administration (stage 2), carried out at an interval of two weeks. This analysis allows the test-retest reliability to be verified, measuring the degree to which participants' responses remain constant over time (Table 4).

Table 4. Correlations between items in Romanian in stage 1 and 2

Items in Romanian, stage 1	Items in Romanian, stage 2	Pearson Coefficient	p value
R1.1	R1.2	.495**	p<0.01
R2.1	R2.2	.836**	p<0.01
R3.1	R3.2	.828**	p<0.01
R4.1	R4.2	.682**	p<0.01
R5.1	R5.2	.578**	p<0.01
R6.1	R6.2	.513**	p<0.01
R7.1	R7.2	.873**	p<0.01
R8.1	R8.2	.588**	p<0.01
R9.1	R9.2	.545**	p<0.01
R10.1	R10.2	.543**	p<0.01

Note: n=39, **. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

The Pearson correlations obtained for the Romanian language version range from 0.495 to 0.873, all of which are statistically significant ($p<0.01$). These values suggest a moderate test-retest reliability, but less stable than that observed for the English version. This result suggests that participants did not respond in a perfectly consistent way to the same version of the test, which may be an indicator of a more fluctuating perception of test anxiety in the Romanian version.

The highest correlation was observed for R7.1 & R7.2 ($r=0.873$, $p<0.01$), suggesting a good consistency of this item between administrations, indicating that it measures an aspect of test anxiety that is stably perceived by participants (I feel out of sorts or not really myself when I take important exams).

The lowest correlation was recorded for R1.1 & R1.2 ($r=0.495$, $p<0.01$), suggesting that this item was the most unstable between the two administrations ("The closer I am to a major exam, the harder it is for me to concentrate on the material."). However, the response to this item (R1) can be interpreted differently depending on the proximity of a real exam, which explains the high variability of responses to this item between the two administrations (the first test was performed

at the beginning of the semester, a very low-stress period for students, and the second test was closer to the middle of the semester, where several exams are already announced).

Conclusion

This research aimed to evaluate the test-retest reliability and linguistic equivalence of the Westside Test Anxiety Scale in English and Romanian, by administering it in two stages, at an interval of two weeks. The analysis included four sets of correlations: (1) test-retest reliability of the English version, (2) test-retest reliability of the Romanian version, (3) linguistic equivalence between versions in stage 1, and (4) linguistic equivalence between versions in stage 2. The results indicated that both versions of the scale show moderate test-retest reliability, but the English version demonstrated a higher stability of the responses (correlation range: 0.516 - 0.763, $p < 0.01$) compared to the Romanian version (0.495 - 0.873, $p < 0.01$), where a higher variability between items was observed. In terms of linguistic equivalence, both stages indicated high correlations between the English and Romanian versions (stage 1: 0.565 - 0.881, $p < 0.01$; stage 2: 0.678 - 0.928, $p < 0.01$), suggesting a faithful translation of the scale. Interestingly, linguistic equivalence was higher in stage 2, which may indicate either a greater familiarity of participants with the scale or a reduction in interpretation variations between the two versions at the second administration.

Despite the promising results, this research has certain limitations that need to be considered. First, the sample size for the test-retest analysis has been reduced ($n = 39$), which may affect the stability of statistical estimates and limit the generalizability of the results. Second, because participants completed both versions of the scale in the same session, their responses may have been influenced by familiarization or comparison effects between versions, which may overestimate linguistic equivalence. In addition, certain items in the Romanian version showed higher variability between administrations, suggesting that certain formulations could be interpreted differently depending on the context or recent experiences of the participants.

As a future direction, a review of the items with low correlations in the Romanian version will be carried out, analyzing whether their wording can be improved to ensure a clearer and more consistent interpretation between administrations. In parallel, a careful verification of the translation will be carried out to eliminate any semantic discrepancies between the English and Romanian versions. After this adjustment phase, a new study will be carried out on a sample consisting exclusively of students enrolled in English-language teaching programs, the questionnaires being filled in physically, in an organized session, under direct supervision, to ensure uniform administration conditions. In addition, a bonus will be introduced for participants, which will help increase engagement and obtain more accurate data.

Once the optimal validation of the Romanian version of the scale has been obtained, it can be applied to larger and more diverse samples, allowing the detailed investigation of the level of anxiety about exams among students and the analysis of possible differences depending on variables such as field of study, academic experience or language skills. Thus, this research represents a first step towards strengthening a reliable psychometric tool for measuring test anxiety among bilingual and international students.

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Appendix 1

Westside Test Anxiety Scale items

Codes	Items in English	Code	Items in Romanian
E1.1 & E1.2	The closer I am to a major exam, the harder it is for me to concentrate on the material.	R1.1 & R1.2	Cu cât sunt mai aproape de un examen important, cu atât îmi este mai greu să mă concentrez asupra materialului de studiu.
E2.1 & E2.2	When I study, I worry that I will not remember the material on the exam.	R2.1 & R2.2	Când învăț, îmi fac griji că la examen nu-mi voi aminti informațiile studiate.
E3.1 & E3.2	During important exams, I think that I am doing awful or that I may fail.	R3.1 & R3.2	În timpul examenelor importante, am impresia că mă descurc foarte prost sau că voi eșua.
E4.1 & E4.2	I lose focus on important exams, and I cannot remember material that I knew before the exam.	R4.1 & R4.2	Îmi pierd concentrarea în timpul examenelor importante și nu îmi mai amintesc informațiile învățate pe care le știam înainte de examen.
E5.1 & E5.2	I finally remember the answer to exam questions after the exam is already over.	R5.1 & R5.2	Îmi amintesc răspunsurile corecte la întrebările examenului abia după ce examenul s-a încheiat.
E6.1 & E6.2	I worry so much before a major exam that I am too worn out to do my best on the exam.	R6.1 & R6.2	Îmi fac atât de multe griji înainte de un examen important încât sunt prea epuizat pentru a da tot ce pot la examen.
E7.1 & E7.2	I feel out of sorts or not really myself when I take important exams.	R7.1 & R7.2	Mă simt ciudat sau nu mă simt în apele mele atunci când susțin examene importante.
E8.1 & E8.2	I find that my mind sometimes wanders when I am taking important exams.	R8.1 & R8.2	Observ că, uneori, în timpul examenelor importante, gândurile îmi zboară la altceva.
E9.1 & E9.2	After an exam, I worry about whether I did well enough.	R9.1 & R9.2	După un examen, îmi fac griji dacă m-am descurcat suficient de bine.
E10.1 & E10.2	I struggle with writing assignments, or avoid them as long as I can. I feel that whatever I do will not be good enough.	R10.1 & R10.2	Am dificultăți în realizarea sarcinilor scrise sau chiar încerc să le amân pe cât posibil. Simt că orice aș face nu va fi suficient de bine.