



香港城市大學
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Enhancing students' English-language test performance through stress re-appraisal

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Abstract:

Many local university students are preparing themselves to sit in internationally recognized English-language tests such as IELTS (International English Language Testing System) and TOEFL (Test of English as a Foreign Language) every year. Results of which not only are important for the study or career development of the students, but also hinge on the overall competitiveness of the graduates from CityU. Similar to many other testing situations where one's performance is being evaluated, it is not uncommon for students to report exhibiting stress responses (e.g., racing heart beat) when taking these English-language tests. And more often than not, stress arousal bodily responses are considered as a sign of anxiety which are detrimental to performance. Recent studies, however, have shown that arousal responses due to stress are not necessarily detrimental. On the contrary, bodily arousals can actually enhance performance if the performer appraises them as an aid in performing the task. In other words, what is crucial is not whether stress responses exist but how one conceptualizes those responses. Recent evidence suggests that people who have received a simple and brief stress reappraisal instruction (during which they were told that stress responses are evolved to help one overcome challenges) showed more adaptive physiological responses under stress, exhibited lower anxiety when giving a public speech, and performed better in real examination settings, relative to a control group without such an instruction. In light of these promising findings, the present project is proposed to 1) examine the effects of stress reappraisal on giving a public speech in English among local university students whose native language is not English, 2) examine the effects of stress reappraisal on real English-language testing contexts, and 3) transfer the findings from laboratory and applied studies to the public by promoting the idea of positive reappraisal of stress to the students who are going to take the English-language tests. Theoretically, findings from this project can inform us the effects of stress reappraisal on second language speech performance, as well as the relationship between cognitive framing and stress coping. Practically, this project promotes an evidence-based skill for local university students to make better use of stress responses and thus enhance their performance in real English-language tests.