Palestinian Undergraduate Learners' Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety in Online Environments

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Abstract
Despite foreign language classroom anxiety having been studied since the 1980s, there has been little research into this phenomenon in the context of online and blended learning environments. There is a clear need for this study as higher education becomes ever more adaptable, post-pandemic. The portfolio of methods for supporting teaching and learning is widening, with most institutions now offering online and hybrid modules and courses. The purpose of this study was to investigate the levels of anxiety among Palestinian undergraduates learning the English language through online courses. This study also investigated the effects of gender variables (310

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*males and 1210 females) on foreign language classroom anxiety levels. We
surveyed a random sample of 1520 undergraduate students from different
universities in Palestine. We used the well-established Foreign Language
Classroom Anxiety Scale FLCAS (Horwitz et al., 1986; Horwitz, 2016),
which is the most commonly-used measure of anxiety related to language
learning. The findings of the study revealed that undergraduate learners
experience anxiety when speaking with native speakers. Results indicate
no significant differences in the students' gender and foreign language
classroom anxiety at universities. However, female learners were more
anxious in language classrooms where the level of classroom anxiety was
high. Finally, we offer tentative solutions for how tutors can support
students experiencing foreign language anxiety.*

Keywords: Gender, language classroom anxiety, learning environment
online courses.

1. INTRODUCTION

In some ways, traditional classroom instruction and evaluation have been substituted by online teaching and learning in universities throughout the COVID pandemic (see, e.g., Batez, 2021; Cheung, 2021; Coman et al., 2020; Hodges et al., 2020; Osman, 2020; Smith & Traxler, 2022). With the spread of the pandemic, there have been concerns, initiatives, and advancements regarding instruction, learning, and evaluation in unconventional contexts (García-Peñalvo et al., 2021). While we are entering a post-pandemic world, the abrupt shift to online modes of teaching and learning precipitated by COVID-19 demonstrated to many educators that there is much that can be achieved online that complements – or exceeds – what can be done in traditional face-to-face learning environments. Maximizing these opportunities is part of a growing worldwide interest in using technology in education (Qaddumi et al., 2021). The development of ICT in support of teaching and studying foreign languages has not been isolated from this burgeoning use of technology in universities, especially online language learning (McQuirter, 2020).

While we move on to a full literature review in the next section, we note here that anxiety is an unavoidable part of learning, especially in Higher Education, where the stakes are high and where many outcomes are determined by examination, which is, by its nature, anxiety-inducing (Trifoni & Shahini, 2011). Language learning adds an extra stressor to what can already be an anxiety-inducing experience (Kráľová & Sorádová, 2015). This is also true of English language learning in Palestine, which is the specific focus of this paper.

Beginning with their first semester of university, students must take numerous exams as part of their language learning process, which causes them anxiety (e.g., Farran et al., 2020). Passing an English language entrance exam is crucial for students in Palestine who want to enroll in universities and take a variety of English-language courses using a blended learning approach. This factor increases the students' worry and anxiety while learning and lowers their self-esteem. This study attempts to determine the level of anxiety that undergraduate students experience when using blended learning. Additionally, it assesses the degree of classroom anxiety among

university students in English language courses who are experiencing blended learning.

English is considered as a foreign language (EFL) in Palestine. English became a significant language of political, economic, and cultural power in Palestine during the British Mandate (Bianchi & Hussein-Abdel Razeq, 2017). English is used in the Palestinian context as a foreign language as it is only used at schools, colleges, and universities inside English language learning classrooms (El-Helou, 2010). With the construction of the separation wall between Palestinian territories and Israel in 2002, some solidarity movements began to visit the wall, where people found a chance to communicate with foreigners. That was the only case where people in Palestine used English outside the classroom. English is placed in the expanding circle (Tajeddin & Pakzadian, 2020). In Palestine, schoolchildren used to begin English instruction in the fifth grade at the age of 11. Later, the Palestinian Ministry of Education and Higher Education (MoEHE) decided that learners begin studying English in first grade. Many academics and researchers questioned the advantages of such a policy change (Bianchi & Hussein-Abdel Razeq, 2017). According to Shehadeh and Dwaik (2013), large class sizes, a lack of weekly instructional time, limited access to technology as additional barriers to learning English, and teaching English in a cultural vacuum, which makes it seem unimportant and undesirable to students, all have an impact on the quality of English instruction. They further point out that young children who must learn English frequently have not even established critical thinking skills in Standard Arabic before studying English, thereby impeding their growth in English. This is due to the diglossic nature of Arabic. There is no question that these elements, particularly substantial class sizes, present significant obstacles to English Language Teaching ELT in Palestinian public schools.

Our personal experiences with Palestinian schools aroused our attention, and conversations with students over time revealed that many students face fear when learning a language. What makes this study special is that all the studies carried out in the Palestinian context investigated one type of language anxiety. For example, Yahya (2013) studied only speaking anxiety in speaking courses among Palestinian students at Arab American University in Palestine. Abu Taha and Abu Rezeq (2018) studied oral communication apprehension among students at Al Quds Open University in Palestine. We were thus motivated to investigate the realities of foreign language classroom anxiety and, as such, the study addresses the following research questions that underpinned our inquiry:

1. What is the level of foreign language classroom anxiety in students at universities?
2. Is there a significant relationship between students' gender and foreign language classroom anxiety at universities?

These questions provide a basis for exploring the level of foreign language classroom anxiety in Palestinian university students.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Types of Foreign Language Anxiety

Anyone who uses a second or foreign language could show anxiety, tension, or apprehension (Horwitz et al., 1986). Without a doubt, language is a vital tool for

interaction between individuals where they may share their thoughts and ask each other questions. Learning a language has become a crucial tool for becoming fluent in a language of communication and for educating people about the various features and laws of that language. A literature review leads one to the conclusion that education entails putting a lot of demands and needs on students and that learning a language is challenging. An umbrella term for tension, worry, and self-doubt, anxiety can be broadly classified as a disorder (National Institute of Mental Health, 2023). Anxious conduct and anxiety are two terms used to describe a person's persistent attitudes in various situations. These emotions include anxiety before online or in-person exams, worry about a communication scenario, and fear of how others will perceive one's language (Luo & Xu, 2016; Peng, 2009; Russell, 2020). Based on ground-breaking research, the affective filter hypothesis contends that when language learners experience anxiety, a mental filter that prevents linguistic input from entering is activated (Krashen, 1982). Thus, perceptions of stress and anxiety among students may hurt language learning (Jugo, 2020).

For some students, language classroom anxiety can be overwhelming for students, with studies showing a connection between anxiety and performance in foreign language classrooms. Anxiety arises from fear of the learning environment. This anxiety can reflect the suffering of native speakers or those using other languages to correct it (Kráľová & Sorádová, 2015; MacIntyre, 2017). Foreign language classroom anxiety involves feeling uncomfortable, tense, and dreadful, reflecting native speakers' suffering and second language learners' struggles in teaching communicative and receptive skills like speaking and writing or receptive skills like reading and listening (Marlow, 2021; Newton & Nation, 2020; Sabina, 2018; Szyszka, 2017).

There are three kinds of language anxiety (Nugroho et al., 2021). Communication anxiety occurs when learners struggle with interpersonal communication, while test anxiety is a fear of failing exams and unpleasant memories. Both are influenced by a fear of failure (Anjaniputra, 2021; Rahmat, 2020). Finally, avoidance of situations that could lead to a poor evaluation out of fear. Fear of unfavorable appraisal, according to Lisnychenko et al. (2020), is described as anxiety over other people's opinions and distress.

According to Anjaniputra (2021), a type of shyness characterized by fear or anxiety about communicating with people is communication apprehension. Speaking anxiety results from a lack of trust in one's linguistic knowledge. Speaking in front of the class and other students makes people anxious when learning a foreign language (Pahargyan, 2021). It is consistent with how communication anxiety manifests itself, as Horwitz et al. (1986) suggested that it is difficult for students to speak in front of groups or in public.

Test anxiety can be 'an unpleasant feeling or emotional state that has both physiological and behavioral components, and that is experienced in formal testing or other evaluative situations' (Dusek, 1980, p. 88). According to Sarason (1986) and Sarason and Sarason (1990), this particular fear increases during tests, and the person suffers no apparent anxiety in normal situations. Test anxiety stems from state and trait anxiety (Spielberger, 1980). Test anxiety is a form of anxiety that is brought on by a fear of failing, making faultless performance the only definable accomplishment and increases while students attend exams (Chapell et al., 2005; Sarı et al., 2018), and it is usually related to the student's past experiences. Test-anxious students experience

ruminative thoughts of disappointment, pain, and physiological thrill, leading to anxiety and fear of failure, potentially causing disastrous consequences. (Wang & Zhan, 2020).

Additionally, due to the frequent evaluation of student performance, test anxiety is a widely prevalent phenomenon in language classes (Al-Saggaf & Al-Aidaros, 2021). Lack of preparation and stress are two major causes of exam anxiety (Umisara et al., 2021). Students who cram the night before the examination, have poor time and study management and struggle to comprehend literature are underprepared students. The second element, meanwhile, has something to do with anxiety regarding performance on previous tests, how peers and other students do, and the adverse effects of failure (Darmawangsa et al., 2020).

Fear of negative evaluation is a general anxiety that involves avoiding evaluations and not thinking negatively about others' opinions. This anxiety can occur in various situations, including group projects and interviews, and can hinder students' ability to start conversations or interact with others (Al-Shboul, 2022; Mokhtar & Haron, 2021; Rofida, 2021; Zhang & Lai, 2023).

2.2   Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety among Blended Learning Students

Many learners who suffer from foreign language classroom anxiety might decide to engage in an online course because they want to feel safe and anonymous, as they think there will not be many speaking exercises or opportunities for peer engagement (Rajendran & Yunus, 2021). However, in reality, according to Zhang and Zou (2022), online language students are frequently obliged to use audio and video resources to connect with their teachers and peers in the target language; as a result, students may experience anxiety related to both the language and the use of the instructional technologies (Timpe-Laughlin et al., 2020). Numerous students are currently being compelled to learn languages online, and their lack of choice in the method of instruction delivery may also be a source of anxiety. Not all students are suited to online language learning, particularly those who lack the drive and/or self-discipline necessary to take ownership of their education (Al Lily et al., 2020). In addition, online students must allot enough time to complete the course on time, ask for assistance when necessary, and be willing to learn despite being emotionally and physically isolated from their peers (Thumvichit, 2021).

Lisnychenko et al. (2020) compared students' foreign language classroom anxiety in face-to-face and online settings in Ukraine. Results showed increased communication anxiety and fear of negative evaluations, while test anxiety and fear of mistakes decreased slightly. Changes in the learning context and virtual classrooms led to decreased anxiety levels. Strategies for lowering language anxiety include raising students' knowledge, computer-based communication proficiency, peer support, and learner autonomy.

Pichette (2009) analyzed the anxiety levels of traditional and online language learners at various levels in Canada. When all levels of learners were considered, the results of his study showed no variations in the anxiety profiles between classroom and distance learners, and no sign that advanced online students experienced less anxiety than first-semester students in traditional classes. Gopang et al. (2015) investigated students' anxiety about learning a foreign language in Pakistan. Additionally, the results showed no difference between the anxiety levels of majoring and non-majoring

students. Additionally, there was no difference in linguistic anxiety between male and female respondents. A significant association between the variables was also revealed. The results indicated that students had relatively high anxiety when learning English online.

Zrekat et al. (2016) investigated how anxious Jordanian undergraduate students studying English as a foreign language (EFL) were about their oral communication skills at Jerash University. The results showed that 60.7% of the respondents reported feeling anxious when speaking English. Kültür and Özcan (2022) studied the associations between the cognitive and emotional components of test anxiety. The results showed that the cognitive and emotional components of test anxiety had significant negative relationships with the test performance of the high-achieving group.

The results of these previous studies that dealt with this subject by study and analysis varied according to many variables, including gender, where the results tended to record anxiety more among females, and levels of achievement, where anxiety was more pronounced among the categories of moderate and low achievement compared to those of high achievement. Another variable was the type of test, where anxiety was more common among candidates for important (high-risk) state exams. Studies also indicated many interventional and therapeutic techniques and methods designed to overcome this problem, including funny drawings, expressive methods, breathing exercises, studying more effectively, relaxation, adequate sleep, and others.

The aforementioned studies demonstrate that anxiety is a critical issue in learning at all levels and has not been resolved for all learners by the time they reach Higher Education. This literature review has shown how important it is to investigate the severity of foreign language classroom anxiety within the framework of blended learning. Our current study is only one part of those efforts. We also see that this problem negatively impacts the performance and delivery of tests or the attempt to learn languages, especially foreign ones, whether the education is conducted face-to-face or online, and that its impact affects all categories of achievement.

3.   METHODS

3.1   Participants and Locations

There are nine universities in the northern part of Palestine. The study was conducted in the academic year of 2021–2022 when many students attended these universities. Thus, 20% of the students at universities participated in the study. A survey of students to collect data was used. Table 1 displays the sample. The students completed the surveys to elicit their' perceptions of language anxiety. The data was analyzed with the help of SPSS software.

Table 1. Details on the sample and population.

Gender	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Male	310	20.4%
Female	1210	79.6%
Total	1520	100%

3.2 Instruments

The scale we used was mainly based on Horwitz et al. (1986) and Horwitz (2016) and other research studies conducted by Alam (2013), Sarı et al. (2018), and Xie et al. (2019) and focused on the level of foreign language classroom anxiety in university students and their relation to gender. The Cronbach's alpha reliability coefficient for the scale was 0.78. The researchers used the standard FLCAS tool, or Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale, to determine students' levels of EFL learning anxiety (Horwitz et al., 1986) in online courses. The FLCAS has undergone comprehensive validation for construct validity, internal reliability, and test-retest reliability. It has been used in 106 studies in 35 countries/regions (Toyama & Yamazaki, 2022).

For our research, a survey with a five-point Likert scale and two parts was given out. The purpose of part one was to gather personal data about the participants, such as their gender. The second portion was used to identify how anxious students were in the classroom when taking an English as a Foreign Language Course (EFLC). This scale was made up of the 33 items of the FLCAS, of which eight items measure communicative apprehension (1, 9, 14, 18, 24, 27, 29, and 32), nine items measure fear of negative evaluation (3, 7, 13, 15, 20, 23, 25, 31, and 33), and five items deal with test anxiety (2, 8, 10, 19, and 21). The other 11 items were grouped under foreign language classroom anxiety in EFL learning.

The FLCAS was created to investigate the students' test anxiety, fear of negative evaluation, and foreign language classroom anxiety related to communication apprehension. The extant literature describes how learners' shyness is brought on by nervousness when attempting to speak in a foreign language is known as communication apprehension. Similarly, test anxiety is shown to be caused by language learners' dread of failing or performing poorly. Apprehension, avoidance, and expectation of a harmful evaluation by others are all terms used to describe the anxiety of receiving a bad review. Several specialists from different universities were given the scale by the researcher, and all agreed that it was appropriate for this study (Botes et al., 2020).

3.3 Technique of Data Collection

We surveyed students to understand their anxiety and confidence about learning languages online. We asked students how they felt when learning a language online to determine their anxiety. Tables 3, 4, and 5 (see section 4) display the outcomes, whereas Table 6 shows the ranks of domains. Please see Table 2 for our classification of responses: for example, we have classed an average response of less than 50% as a 'very low' response".

3.4 Technique of Data Analysis

To understand, organize, analyze the results, and convert the various formats of the data into a consistent and clear format, we used quantitative data analysis techniques that involved dealing with numerical variables. We used several statistics such as frequencies and percentages, means, and Standard Deviation to measure and identify the level of anxiety the students may have. An Independent Samples T-Test

was implemented as the two-sample means, males and females, were from unrelated groups. We used SPSS software version 22 to manipulate data. The items and domains were designed to solicit students' perceptions of their language learning anxiety.

3.5 Scaling

The scaling of the items was the following: We gave five points for 'strongly agree', four points for 'agree', three points for 'undecided', two points for 'disagree', and one point for 'strongly disagree' (Berowa, 2018). Table two demonstrates how the responses are categorized.

Table 2. Responses' percentage scale.

Percentage	Level
Less than 50 %	Very low
From 50-59 %	Low
From 60-69 %	Moderate
From 70-79%	High
80% and more	Very high

4.   FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

4.1   The Level of Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety of University Students

4.1.1 The level of foreign language classroom anxiety in the communication apprehension domain

A survey of students was conducted to understand how Palestinian university students perceive the degree of their language learning anxiety. Table 3 displays the outcomes. As stated, a survey at the universities was conducted to get a sense of how students felt about learning a foreign language online.

Table 3. Palestinian university students' perceptions of their level of foreign language classroom anxiety in the communicative apprehension domain.

No.	Items	Mean	Percentage	Degree
1.	Whenever I talk in English, I never feel completely confident in myself.	3.23	68.20%	Moderate
2.	When I have to speak in front of the class without any practice, I start to become nervous.	3.58	72.20%	High
3.	I wouldn't feel comfortable conversing in English with native speakers.	4.05	80.50%	Very high
4.	When I speak in English in my language lesson, I feel confident.	2.22	51.20%	Low
5.	When I talk in front of the other students in English, I feel really self-conscious.	3.20	61.01%	Moderate
6.	I get nervous and confused when I am speaking in my language class.	3.25	64.24%	Moderate
7.	When the language teacher speaks, and I don't comprehend every word, I become anxious.	3.23	65.20%	Moderate
8.	I doubt that being around English native speakers would make me feel at ease.	3.05	61.05%	Moderate
	Total score	3.23	66.54%	Moderate

Table 3 indicates that the degree of foreign language classroom anxiety of the university students in the communication apprehension domain was generally moderate ($M = 3.23$), where 66.54% of the respondents agreed on the essence of the item. However, it was very high on item number 3, as its response was 80.40%. In addition, 72.20% of the respondents indicated that when they had to speak in an online foreign language class without any practice, they started to experience anxiety. Students with such feelings of anxiety or wordiness may be affected by their achievement. These findings suggest that students would experience anxiety if they communicated with native English speakers online. This lack of interaction and conversation with native speakers – and even foreigners online – makes students feel stressed and anxious. According to the responses on the first item, it was clear that students needed to be more self-confident when they went to the online language classrooms. These results concur with Tanveer (2007), Al-Jamal and Al-Jamal (2014), and Alrashidi and Phan (2015).

Furthermore, students lacked confidence when speaking a foreign language in their online language class. This feeling resulted from English being a foreign language where students do not have enough chances to interact and communicate. Students who learn English as a foreign language face many challenges regarding basic language skills and oral communication with native speakers due to their low level of confidence and lack of practice in communicating in the English language and their general use of the Arabic language in various social activities within EFL classes. The process of learning English as a foreign language is primarily based on teaching reading and comprehension skills. Zrekat et al. (2016) and Tridinanti (2018) concur with this result and claim that psychological factors like anxiety and self-confidence might impact the capacity to communicate in a foreign language. In foreign language classes, learners who exhibit high levels of anxiety, worry, fear, and low levels of self-confidence may struggle to improve their speaking skills.

4.1.2 The level of foreign language classroom anxiety in fear of negative evaluation domain

Students were surveyed to evaluate their fear of negative evaluation. The findings were obtained by computing the means and percentages for each survey question. Students were asked to list their difficulties while participating in educational activities.

Table 4. Means and percentages of students' degree of foreign language classroom anxiety in the fear of negative evaluation domain.

No.	Items	Mean	Percentage	Degree
9.	When I anticipate being quizzed in the language class, I quake.	3.00	60.00%	Moderate
10.	I frequently believe that the other pupils are linguistically more proficient than I am.	3.33	66.00%	Moderate
11.	I feel embarrassed to offer solutions in my language lesson.	2.80	46.40%	Low
12.	When I can't grasp what the teacher is correcting, I become irate.	2.56	41.20%	Low
13.	When I'm going to be called on in language class, I can feel my heart beating.	2.58	41.22%	Low

Table 4 continued…

14.	I frequently believe that other pupils speak English more fluently than I do.	3.32	65.00%	Moderate
15.	The pace of language instruction is so rapid that I'm concerned about falling behind.	2.70	50.00%	Low
16.	When I speak in English, I worry that the other students in my class will make fun of me.	3.56	71.20%	High
17.	When the language instructor gives me a question that I haven't thought about in advance, I become anxious.	3.55	71.00%	High
	Total score	2.70	59.68%	Low

Students were asked to identify the degree of their foreign language classroom anxiety and fear of negative evaluation. For example, students reported high degrees for items 16 ($M = 3.56$, 71.20%) and 17 ($M = 3.55$, 71.00%), while the degrees were moderate for items 9, 10, and 14, with percentages of 71.20% and 71.00%. However, the responses for items 11, 12, and 15 and the total score were low, with percentages between 50% and 59%.

According to the results displayed in Table 4, students believed they could not have the desired and appropriate social impact. Some degree of the procedure was influenced by the fear of being judged by others. In this regard, we observed among the students that their anxiety about teacher evaluation was lower than their anxiety about peer evaluation. Most of the students were highly afraid that the other students in the class would laugh at them when they communicated inthe English language. They experienced stress when the language teacher asked questions that they did not prepare in advance. Students felt very shy and afraid when they were called on in online language classes during a course, so they did not like the idea of being called on to participate. As students reported, during language class, they got upset when they did not understand what the teacher was correcting. These challenges were also highlighted by Aida (1994), Kitano (2001), Qaddomi (2013), Rahmat (2020), Russell (2020), and Pan and Zhang (2021). They further explain that, when students in English language courses are not very familiar with the content and the teacher asks them, they express significant levels of anxiety due to being negatively evaluated by the teacher and classmates.

4.1.3 The level of foreign language classroom anxiety in the test anxiety domain

The test anxiety is represented by five items in the survey. Table 5 demonstrates the test anxiety among EFL students.

Table 5. Means and percentages of students' degree of foreign language classroom test anxiety.

No.	Items	Mean	Percentages	Degree
18.	Making mistakes in the English classroom worries me.	3.35	65.50%	Moderate
19.	When I take assessments in my language class, I often feel comfortable and at ease.	1.81	46.20%	Very low
20.	The repercussions of failing my language class frighten me.	3.50	70.00%	High
21.	I worry that my language instructor will fix every error I make.	3.15	62.50%	Moderate

Table 5 continued…

22.	I am increasingly confused when I study for a language test.	2.87	52.60%	Moderate
	Total score	2.88	53.24%	Moderate

The results indicated that the degree of students' foreign language classroom test anxiety was moderate. For example, the most frequent challenges and affecting factors that contributed to their degree of stress and fear of exams were their fear of failing language exams, making mistakes even in online classrooms, and experiencing discomfort when taking tests in their online language classes; these factors of academic stress could also lead to the fear of being evaluated academically. Items like item 19, 'I usually feel comfortable when taking tests in a language classroom', scored very low ($M = 1.81$, 46.20%). Students denied feeling comfortable throughout assessments in their language lessons in general. They were concerned about what would happen if they failed the course. As a result of the absence of dialogic feedback, students worried about the consequences of failing their English class.

These results confirm Cooper and Brownell (2020) and Kültür and Özcan (2022), who indicated that test anxiety is thought to be a worry about making mistakes in exams. It is further asserted that test anxiety is related to trepidation about the academic examination, which arises from a fear of failing. People with test anxiety may feel physically unwell, have rapid heartbeats, sweat, trembling, and/or have difficulties sleeping. In two anxiety level tests involving fear of receiving a poor grade and test anxiety, EFL students showed some worry when studying English. These two anxiety level scores were also positively associated. Even in the virtual language classroom, students were concerned about making mistakes.

4.1.4 The level of foreign language classroom anxiety in the EFL learning domain

Based on Table 6, students reported feeling anxious about learning the English language, even in online classes. For example, relatively few pupils felt that they were very sure and relaxed when they had language class ($M = 1.54$, 39%). This conveys a negative meaning since it suggests that pupils do not feel at ease and secure in an EFL classroom. The replies ranged from high for items 23 and 27 (scores between 70 and 79%) to medium for items 24 through 33 (total score between 60 and 69%) to low for items 29 and 32 (scores between 50 and 59%). Given that its proportion was 65.71%, the overall score was middling. Except for item number 32 (When I'm on my way to language class, I feel very sure and relaxed), which is negative in meaning because it suggests that students do not feel relaxed and confident when they attend an EFL classroom, the figures from Table 7 show that most of the items in this domain scored moderate to high levels of anxiety.

Table 6. Means and percentages of students' degree of EFL learning anxiety.

No.	Items	Mean	Percentage	Degree
23.	When I can't comprehend what the teacher is saying in English, I am scared.	4.00	80.00%	Very high
24.	I wouldn't mind taking additional English language lessons at all.	2.13	4.60%	Very low
25.	I often find myself thinking about stuff unrelated to the lesson when in a language class.	3.35	65.50%	Moderate

Table 6 continued…

26.	Why some individuals get so outraged over language lessons is beyond me.	3.15	62.50%	Moderate
27.	I sometimes become so tense in language classes that I forget stuff I already know.	3.90	79.01%	High
28.	I have anxiety even when I am fully prepared for a language class.	03.3	65.00%	Moderate
29.	I frequently consider skipping my language class.	2.27	57.00%	Low
30.	I don't feel any pressure to do well in language class beforehand.	3.40	68.00%	Moderate
31.	Compared to my other subjects, my language class makes me feel more uncomfortable and anxious.	3.00	60.00%	Moderate
32.	On the way to a language session, I feel really confident and at ease.	1.54	39.00%	Very low
33.	There are so many restrictions in the English language that I find it overwhelming.	3.3	65.00%	Moderate
	Total score	3.29	65.71%	Moderate

4.1.5 Rankings of undergraduate learners in foreign language classrooms at higher education institutions in the online learning course domain

When the averages and percentages of the various anxiety domains were calculated, it was found that the three domains and the total score ranked in the middle. According to these rankings, undergraduate college students reported feeling worried. Undergraduate students had a foreign language classroom anxiety level that was very mild, at 3.15 on average.

Table 7. Means and percentages of foreign language classroom anxiety in undergraduate learners in the domains and total score.

No.	Domain	Mean	Percentage	Rank
1.	Communication apprehension	3.22	65.44	Moderate
2.	Fear of negative evaluation	2.85	59.52	Low
3.	Test anxiety	3.00	60.00	Moderate
4.	Language Class anxiety	3.33	65.55	Moderate
	Total score	3.15	63.10	Moderate

Based on Table 7, foreign language classroom anxiety among undergraduate students was moderate for domains 1, 3, and 4, and their overall scores for their degrees ranged from 60% to 69%. However, because the response rate was only 59.52%, it was low for domain number 2. It is acceptable to say that, depending on the evaluations of the domains, communication apprehension was ranked moderate since, in an EFL class, students who were required to speak without preparation were worried. Communicative apprehension is a sort of shyness that occurs when communicating with others and displays uneasiness. Additionally, when interacting with English-speaking natives, they were likely to feel uneasy. This resulted in a moderate level of anxiety about receiving bad feedback. This is due to, as is the case at the HEIs in Palestine, requirements for students to raise their level of knowledge, as is the case in any educational institution. Therefore, at any point of cross-linguistic development, not just at elementary levels, learners may perceive a discrepancy between their language knowledge and the need to succeed in the tasks conducted in class.

The learners' limited English proficiency, which prevents them from freely communicating with others, articulating themselves effectively during class, and responding appropriately to teachers' inquiries, was another factor the researcher identified as contributing to the students' nervousness. Students are therefore more concerned in English classes than in other classes since much communication is involved. The lack of adequate English proficiency among the learners, which prevented them from speaking openly, explaining themselves adequately in the classroom, and responding appropriately to teachers' queries, was another factor the researcher identified as contributing to the students' nervousness. As a result, learners are more nervous in English classes than in other classes because of how much communication is required. This is because learners are not accustomed to speaking before a group of peers and are, therefore, reluctant to talk in English sessions. This result concurs with Yahya (2013), who explains that students are not allowed to practice their English. Their exposure to the language is insufficient to enable them to speak more freely and, as a result, experience less communication anxiety.

4.2 The Relationship between Students' Gender and Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety at Universities in Palestine

The second research question aimed to identify whether there is a significant relationship between students' gender and foreign language classroom anxiety at universities in Palestine. Table 8 shows the results of this question.

Table 8. Results of the independent samples t-test based on gender variables.

No.	Domain	Male		Female		(T)	SIG
		M	S.D.	M	S.D.		
1	Communication apprehension	3.02	0.59	3.30	0.50	0.10	0.91
2	Fear of negative evaluation	2.80	0.80	3.01	0.57	1.72	0.09
3	Test anxiety	3.10	0.50	3.20	0.63	0.73	0.46
4	Class anxiety	3.01	0.57	3.54	0.54	3.06	0.00*
	Total score	3.08	0.44	3.30	0.42	1.93	0.05

Due to the gender variable in domains 1, 2, and 3 and the overall score, Table 8 demonstrates no significant differences at 0.05 in the association between students' gender and foreign language classroom anxiety at universities. The fourth domain, where the value was 0.00, revealed substantial disparities between students' gender and foreign language classroom anxiety at universities in favor of females. This is because female students in the Arab culture and context are more likely than male students to be shy and cautious in front of others (Abdel-Khalek & Alansari, 2004; Al-Saraj, 2014). The results concur with Çağatay (2015), who found that female students appeared to be quite nervous in speaking. Another interesting finding is that when speaking with a native speaker as opposed to other students, pupils' foreign language anxiety increased (Kamarulzaman et al., 2013). It could be concluded that females showed more foreign language anxiety than males.

However, this is not consistent with Rafek et al. (2014), who showed that male students experience anxiety when they are less self-assured and insecure. Teachers in English courses take on the role of dominators or dictators; this is a customary

setting. Students typically experience anxiety, passivity, or oppression. As a result, they lack a liberated, unstructured setting for learning English.

Last but not least, another aspect that should not be disregarded is the high hopes Palestinian families have for their children; lofty hopes typically do not inspire pupils but frequently lead to increased worry. Most English language learners in Palestine, particularly university students, rarely have the chance to interact with English-speaking natives. As a result, university students typically have more anxiety in English classes. Additionally, reading and writing are heavily emphasized in most Palestinian schools and institutions, whereas speaking and listening are mostly disregarded. These results go against the results of Damanhouri (2022), who concluded that there is a significant reduction in anxiety symptoms in virtual classrooms. The findings showed that the uniqueness of the language and technical difficulties in the classroom are the adverse factors in this situation. Nearly all of the participants in this survey advised using blended learning in the future by better-integrating technology into educational institutions to maximize the advantages of both communication methods.

5.   CONCLUSION

Essential findings about the anxiety of students in Palestinian EFL classes have been provided in this study. Most students were observed to be anxious in class, particularly when it came to speaking with native English speakers. It was discovered that female students experience more anxiety in English classes than male students, particularly in the classroom. Additionally, it was discovered that anxiety, particularly anxiety related to exams and English classes, is a barrier to language learning. The results of this study indicate that the majority of students had moderate levels of communication anxiety. This strongly suggests that anxiety is still one of the impediments to language development, although the level is moderate. For some students, language learning anxiety can be dismissed as a minor concern. However, the effects are too obvious to be dismissed as trivial. Therefore, language lecturers or teachers must be aware of all those aspects, particularly the dread of evaluation.

We are aware of limitations in this study, as with all other studies. These limitations also point toward potential topics to be addressed in the future. Although we posit that we surveyed many students on EFL courses in Palestine, it was only a sample and cannot be read as truly representative of all voices. Although the results are reliable and valid in representing faithfully the perspectives of those who participated, future studies could involve more participants with more diverse viewpoints, perhaps asking teachers/educators for their views. Secondly, as the focus of the study is specifically English language learning in Palestine, the generalization to other contexts is not necessarily reliable. We suggest that future studies may adjust their focus and emphasis to other contexts, such as learning different languages or in different countries. Lastly, as social scientists, it would be good to see a representative sample of participants interviewed to gain a richer, thicker understanding of the phenomena underlying foreign language anxiety (Geertz, 2008).

Since language learning evaluations are unavoidable, students must learn to deal with their anxieties wisely by adopting tactics and preparing for English sessions. Teachers of the English language should address their pupils' emotional needs. A laid-

back classroom setting, for instance, might assist English language learners in feeling comfortable speaking or expressing their opinions in English. Tutors must refrain from making derogatory comments about pupils in the classroom and instead encourage them when they perform poorly. The teachers ought to take action to reduce exam-related stress among students, for instance, by spending five minutes to reassure the students taking the exam that they do not need to focus only on the results. It is suggested that English language instructors invite native speakers to talk to the students as guests, especially online (see Itmeizeh et al., 2022). If not, the lecturer can strengthen their speaking and communication abilities by including drama and role-playing in their lessons. Teachers may consistently recognize students for their contributions and speaking skills. Painful communication-related experiences may cause a person to fear communicating. Behaviorism can support the effects of rewards or verbal praise. Much research has demonstrated that behaviors are more likely to be encouraged by positive outcomes after the action. While it is impossible to eliminate stress and anxiety from learning and, more so, from speaking in another language – especially when being tested in a foreign language – we posit that it is essential for tutors to recognize and reduce the stressors where possible. We hope that this paper adds to our knowledge of foreign language anxiety in the classroom and that it will catalyze investigation into solutions and, in the future, positive change for the benefit of students.

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