

## Investigating Al-Quds Open University Students' EFL Learning Anxiety

دراسة مستوى قلق تعلم اللغة الانجليزية كلغة أجنبية لدى طلبة جامعة القدس المفتوحة

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### Abstract

This study aimed at investigating Al- Quds Open University learners level of anxiety. Also, the study investigated whether anxiety levels are influenced by gender or educational level. The study was carried out on a random sample that consisted of 52 students. For data collection, the researcher adopted FLCAS by Horwitz (1986), as it is the most commonly used to measure language learning anxiety. Results revealed that QOU students are anxious when they have to speak with native speakers. In addition, results indicated that QOU students, especially females, are more anxious when attending an EFL classroom. Moreover, no significant differences were found due to the educational level variable. Some recommendations and pedagogical implications were proposed.

**Key words:** EFL learning anxiety, QOU, gender.

### ملخص

هدفت الدراسة الحالية الى تحديد القلق من تعلم اللغة الانجليزية كلغة اجنبية لدى طلبة جامعة القدس المفتوحة في فلسطين. كما وهدفت الدراسة الى تحديد اثر كل من الجنس والمستوى التعليمي على مستوى قلق تعلم اللغة الانجليزية كلغة اجنبية لدى طلبة الجامعة. اجريت الدراسة على عينة عشوائية قوامها ٥٢ طالبا وطالبة. استخدم الباحث مقياس (Horwitz (1986 كأداة

لجمع البيانات وذلك باعتباره افضل المقاييس لتحديد قلق تعلم اللغة الانجليزية كلغة اجنبية. اظهرت النتائج ان درجة القلق مرتفعة لدى طلبة جامعة القدس المفتوحة بشكل عام في مجال الاتصال والتواصل مع الاجانب (متحدثي اللغة الام)، كما وبينت النتائج ان مستوى القلق من تعلم اللغة الانجليزية كلغة اجنبية اعلى لدى الطلبة الاناث مقارنة مع الذكور في مجال حضور المحاضرات في اللغة الانجليزية. ومن الجدير بالذكر أنه لم توجد هناك فروق ذات دلالة احصائية في مستوى القلق من تعلم اللغة تعزى للمستوى التعليمي كمتغير في الدراسة الحالية.

## Introduction

“Feelings of anxiety, reticence, apprehension and nervousness are commonly expressed by foreign language learners in learning foreign languages” (Tanveer, 2008: 3). Taking into consideration learners’ anxiety reactions in learning to speak another language by a language teacher is deemed highly important in order to assist them to achieve the intended performance goals in the target language. It is observable that students in EFL classrooms experience anxiety that results in stuttering and fast heart rate. According to a huge body of research (Riasati, 2011) these phenomena are attributed to a psychological state anxiety. Many researchers have studied the effects of anxiety on foreign language learning since the 1970's. In spite of the advances in teaching methods such as the integration of cooperative learning in teaching EFL, apprehension continues to exist in the university foreign language classroom (Qaddumi, 2010).

Anxiety has been regarded as one of the most important affective factors influencing EFL acquisition. Much research (i.e., Brown, 1973; Chastain, 1975; Scovel, 1978; Bailey, 1983; Horwitz, Horwitz & Cope, 1986; MacIntyre & Gardner, 1994; Young, 1991), especially in western countries, has been conducted to find the relationship between anxiety and achievement in the learning of different foreign languages. Most studies (e.g., Horwitz, 1986; MacIntyre & Gardner, 1994) arrived at a conclusion that anxiety and achievement are negatively correlated.

### **Problem of the study**

In Palestine, no study has been conducted on the influence of gender and choice of major on students' EFL anxiety, especially in QOU. Therefore, there is a lack of research on such phenomenon. The researcher endeavored to bridge this gap to find out the situation of this neglected aspect of language learning through a study conducted on the QOU students who are taking a course of EFL.

### **Questions of the Study**

This study aimed at answering the following main question:

What is the level of QOU students' EFL learning anxiety?

In answering the above question, the following sub-questions were also answered: Does gender as a demographic variable have a significant influence on the level of QOU students' EFL learning anxiety?

Is there any significant difference in the QOU students' EFL learning anxiety due to the academic level variable?

### **Hypotheses of the study**

The study tested the following hypotheses:

The first hypothesis states that there are no significant differences at ( $\alpha=0.05$ ) in QOU students' level of EFL learning anxiety.

This hypothesis is included two sub-hypotheses based on the study variables.

The first sub-hypothesis states that are no significant differences at ( $\alpha=0.05$ ) in the QOU students' level of EFL anxiety due to gender variable.

The second sub-hypothesis states that are no significant differences at ( $\alpha=0.05$ ) the QOU students' level of EFL anxiety due to academic level variable.

### **Definition of terms**

**EFL:** English as a Foreign Language. In this case English language taught in the Palestinian situation.

**English as a Foreign Language Learners:** are those who are learning English while living in a community where English is not spoken as a first language.

**EFL learning anxiety:** is the fear felt when QOU students are expected to use or act in the foreign language (English in this case).

It is the fear or apprehension occurring when a learner is expected to perform in the second or foreign language or the worry and negative emotional reaction when learning or using a second language (Portugal, 2007: 2).

Anxiety is also defined as “an individual’s level of fear or anxiety associated with either real or anticipated communication with another person or persons” (McCroskey, 1977: 78).

**QOU:** Al Quds Open University.

### **Limitations of the study**

- This study was limited to the QOU students' in Palestine.
- The study involved all the students who study at QOU.
- The study was conducted in the first semester of the scholastic year 2010/2011 starting from the 1<sup>st</sup> of September to the 15<sup>th</sup> of November 2010.

### **Review of literature and related studies**

Generally, anxiety can be defined as a kind of troubled feeling in the mind. It is a subjective feeling of tension, apprehension, nervousness, and worry associated with an arousal of the automatic nervous system (Horwitz, 1986). Usually anxiety is classified into trait anxiety, state anxiety and situation-specific anxiety. Scovel (1978) noted that trait

anxiety refers to a more permanent predisposition to be anxious while state and situation-specific anxiety are usually experienced in relation to some particular event or situation (Brown, 2001).

According to Gardner and MacIntyre (1993) language anxiety could be classified under the category of situation-specific anxiety, which refers to the apprehension experienced when a situation requires the use of a second language with which the individual is not fully proficient.

It is notable that there is a shifting of research focus from teachers to learners in Second Language Acquisition (SLA). Accordingly, affective factors, such as self-esteem, attitudes and motivation, were thought to account a lot for language learning outcomes. Anxiety, as an important affective factor, has been considered very important, and many studies have been undertaken to explore it since the 1970s.

Recent research focused on the causes of language anxiety. Bailey (1983) mentioned, through the analysis of the diaries of 11 learners that competitiveness can lead to anxiety. Besides, Bailey found that tests and learners' perceived relationship with their teachers also contributed to learners' anxiety. These three aspects that Bailey identified were supported in subsequent studies, especially in Young's study. According to Young (1991: 427), there are six potential causes of language anxiety that include personal and interpersonal, learner beliefs about language learning, instructor beliefs about language teaching, instructor-learner interactions, classroom procedures and language tests. From this list we can see that Young, in fact, identified the causes from three perspectives, the learners', teachers' and instructional practice, to which Bailey's findings also complied. However, to date, the findings by Horwitz, Horwitz and Cope (1986) have been the most influential. They identified three causes of language anxiety, these include: communication apprehension, test anxiety and fear of negative evaluation. Based on these three components they also designed a Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale including thirty-three items. This scale was later widely used by researchers to measure foreign language learners' anxiety and examine the effect of anxiety on learning in different contexts. More recently, Horwitz (2001) mentioned that language anxiety

may be a result as well as a cause of insufficient command of the target language. That is to say it may be experienced due to linguistic difficulties foreign language learners face in learning and using the target language.

Cui (2011: 875) added “when the effect of anxiety on learning is explored, an important insight to be referred to is the distinction between debilitating and facilitative anxiety”. Up to now most studies have shown a negative relationship between anxiety and language achievement, that is to say, anxiety is a debilitator in language learning. Krashen (1985) once held in his affective filter hypothesis in which certain emotions, such as anxiety, self-doubt, and mere boredom interfere with the process of acquiring a second language. They work as a filter between the speaker and the listener that minimizes the amount of language input the listener is able to comprehend. These negative feelings hinder efficient processing of the language input. The hypothesis states that the blockage can be reduced by sparking interest, low anxiety environments and increasing the learner's self-esteem. That is to say that high anxiety will prevent the input that learners receive in the classroom from reaching the language acquisition device (LAD). Horwitz (1986, 2001) also asserted that language anxiety can cause students to postpone language study indefinitely or to change majors.

MacIntyre and Gardner (1994) conducted a study on '97 college students concluded that those with anxiety find it more difficult to express their own opinions and tend to underestimate their own capabilities, compared with more relaxed learners. They also concluded that in the three phases of language acquisition (input, processing and output) anxiety and achievement are negatively related. In reference to the negative correlation between anxiety and four skills of language learning, especially speaking and listening, MacIntyre and Gardner (1991) concluded that speaking is by far the main agent of anxiety-arousal, and that students with high anxiety perform worse than those with low anxiety. However, there have been some studies which found neutral and positive relationships between anxiety and second language achievement. Also, in Bailey's (1983) study of competitiveness and

anxiety, it was found that facilitative anxiety was one of the keys to success, and closely related to competitiveness.

In learning foreign languages there are some examples where learners may experience negative feelings along the way. Ariza (2002) revealed that the affected part of a learner can hinder or slow down the learning process, for instance; anxiety. This emotion which creates discomfort, and fear of committing mistakes, or fear of socializing with others, is one of the examples of anxiety.

Some studies have dealt with anxiety and its relation with some learners' variables such as gender, age, learning styles, learning strategies ...etc. for the purpose of convenience, and the next section deals with some of the related studies which may help in the discussion of the results.

Differences in gender between female and male participants regarding anxiety levels and in achievement have been examined in some language anxiety studies. Some researchers (such as Chang, 1997) have suggested that female students often have higher levels of anxiety than males in language learning environment. Concerning language learning, Padilla, Cervantes, Maldonado, and García (1988) reported that female students were more likely to be more apprehensive than male learners. Cheng (2002), who investigated English language writing anxiety in Taiwanese learners, discovered that females were significantly more anxious than males. Rezazadeh and Tavakoli (2009) investigated the relationship between gender and language learning anxiety. They found out that female students have a higher level of test anxiety in contrast to male students.

In other research (Aida, 1994) found no statistically significant relationship between language anxiety in learning Japanese and gender, although mean FLCAS scores were slightly lower for females, males scoring an average of 97.4 on the FLCAS, and females scoring 95.6 (p. 158). Anxiety and gender were also investigated by Onwuegbuzie et al. (1999); they found no statistically significant correlations. Similarly, results of a Belgian study of university students (Dewaele, 2002),

indicated that gender did not correlate significantly with communicative anxiety in either French as a foreign language or in English as a foreign language.

Females and males exhibited different levels of anxiety depending on the kind of anxiety experienced: female students presented significantly higher levels of general Arabic language anxiety levels than males (mean score for females was 90.05, as against that for males: 81.68, p. 213), but no statistically significant differences were seen between sexes in Arabic listening anxiety (Elkhafaifi, 2005).

In the secondary school, Pappamihel (2002) encountered differences in anxiety between Mexican females and males in education in the United States as they moved from the English-as-a-second-language (ESL) classroom to the mainstream classroom, female students experienced significantly more anxiety in the mainstream situation. The purpose of Pappamihel's (2002) investigation was to examine language anxiety in Mexican adolescent girls, extending other studies that had reported that females more than males suffer from worry and anxiety in various academic settings. In this study it was found that females suffered more tension in classroom circumstances than in academic situations. Statistically significant differences were found in degrees of anxiety between the ESL and the mainstream classrooms, and a statistically significant difference due to gender was found with the ELAS (English Language Anxiety Scale). Female students scored a mean of nearly 10 points higher than males on the ELAS as regards anxiety in the mainstream, but not the ESL, classroom. The English language anxiety experienced by females in the mainstream classroom was related to social performance, and was “a type of performance anxiety more related to interactions with peers” (p. 33), whereas in the ESL classroom it was more related to academic anxiety and worries about achievement. Pappamihel speculated that in the latter setting female students' warmer rapport with teachers might compensate for language achievement anxiety. She also posited that in the mainstream classroom, female students “do not have any adequate coping strategy” (p. 34) to deal with the peer-related anxiety prevalent there. Also, in mainstream classes,



females may come into contact with different social groups, including Chicanas (of Mexican ancestry, but born in the USA), and lose the contact and the emotional backing of students in their previous ESL classrooms where they could also speak in their mother tongue if needed.

Another study (Zgutowicz, 2009) investigated the effects language anxiety has on EFL /ESL students' decisions to speak English in the ESL and mainstream classroom. Results indicated levels of language anxiety in the mainstream and ESL/EFL classes, although language anxiety is significantly higher in mainstream classes. Student reports indicated higher levels of anxiety for female students, although language anxiety for males may be more moderate. Causes of language anxiety about speaking via student interviews vary, including peer humiliation, talking in front of native speakers, pronunciation concerns, and classroom environment.

In a study conducted by Tianjian (2010) that investigated the speaking anxiety of Chinese EFL learners, as well as the relationships of speaking anxiety with other variables, including trait anxiety, unwillingness to communicate, language achievement, speaking self-efficacy, language class risk-taking, and language class sociability, it was revealed that (a) over 50% of the students reported experiencing moderate or high levels of speaking anxiety; (b) speaking anxiety did not differ significantly over gender, but differed significantly over groups (lower proficiency groups reported a higher mean level of anxiety); (c) speaking anxiety had a complicated relationship to the other variables; (d) personality factors were found to be the primary causes of speaking anxiety; and (e) mutual influences existed between language achievement and speaking anxiety.

Since anxiety and motivation have been found to be highly correlated to second/foreign language acquisition, Liu and Huang (2011) investigated 980 undergraduate students from three universities in China who answered a 76-item survey. Analyses of the data revealed that (1) the respondents generally did not feel anxious in English and were moderately motivated to learn English, (2) foreign language anxiety and English learning motivation were significantly negatively correlated with

each other, and (3) both foreign language anxiety and English learning motivation were significantly correlated with students performance in English. Among the scales, foreign language classroom anxiety (FLCAS), intrinsic motivation, instrumental motivation, fear of being negatively evaluated (FLCAS1), and interest in foreign languages and cultures (IFLC) proved to be powerful predictors for the latter.

In a recent study conducted by Nahavandi and Mukundan (2013) aimed to determine the level of anxiety of the Iranian EFL students towards English as a foreign language. Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale FLCAS (Horwitz, Horwitz, & Cope, 1986) was implemented to measure anxiety with four scales of communication apprehension, test anxiety, fear of negative evaluation, and fear of English classes. The results of the study revealed that students experienced anxiety in all four scales on the higher side of the range. Communication anxiety was found to be the predominant anxiety component in the students, as compared to other three scales. In addition, gender and first language didn't affect their anxiety significantly. However, level of proficiency affected their anxiety in all four domains significantly.

The world is becoming more convenient, with high-tech equipment and computers being implemented in various ways. Multimedia materials in the English language classrooms play a crucial role in language learning. At the same time, foreign language learners who lack confidence and have low learning motivation suffer poor language performance. Students at the QOU study via e- learning system especially with the integration of Virtual Classes. In this sense, a study was conducted by Huang and Hwang (2013) examined the relationship between multimedia environments and English learning anxiety in EFL college students in Taiwan. A questionnaire was submitted to 124 students who study an English course at Chung Shan Medical University. Its results suggested that a multimedia environment can reduce student anxiety and provide a less stressful classroom environment. Put otherwise, multimedia tools enable English teachers to help students to

both improve their English performance and lower their language anxiety.

### Methodology

For the purpose of the present study, the researcher used the descriptive approach because it suits the nature of the study.

### The population of the study

The population of the present study included all EFL learners at the QOU in Qalqilya educational region. The total population was (2800) students.

### Subjects

The participant subjects in the study consist of a randomly selected sample of fifty two students from QOU (21 females and 31 males).

Tables 1 and 2 show the distribution of the sample in accordance with the study variable.

**Table (1):** Sample Distribution According to Gender.

Gender	Frequency	Percentage%
Male	31	59.6%
Female	21	40.4%
<b>total</b>	<b>52</b>	<b>100%</b>

**Table (2):** Sample Distribution According to Academic Level.

Academic Level	Frequency	Percentage%
Freshmen	12	23.1
Sophomore	9	17.3
Junior	14	26.9
Senior	17	32.7
<b>total</b>	<b>52</b>	<b>100.0</b>

## **Data collection**

### *The Instrument of the study*

One instrument was used for this study. The researcher adopted a questionnaire to determine students' EFL learning anxiety level (FLCAS- Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale- (Horwitz, 1986). A five - point Likert scale questionnaire that consisted of two parts was administered. Part one was intended to collect personal information about the participants, such as their gender, etc. The second part, according to a huge body of research, was extensively used to measure the level of students' classroom anxiety during EFL classes. This questionnaire consisted of 33 statements, of which 8 items were for communication anxiety (1, 9, 14, 18, 24, 27, 29, and 32), 9 items for fear of negative evaluation (3, 7, 13, 15, 20, 23, 25, 31, and 33) and 5 items for test anxiety (2, 8, 10, 19, and 21). As for the remaining 11 items, they were put in a group which was named 'Anxiety of English classes'. The FLCAS was designed to investigate the students' language anxiety concerning communication apprehension, test anxiety, and fear of negative evaluation. Communication apprehension is described as learners' shyness resulting from anxiety while using a foreign language to communicate. Language learners' fear of failure or poor performance leads to test anxiety. Fear of negative evaluation is referred to as apprehension, avoidance, and expectation of a detrimental evaluation by others.

The questionnaire was administered to fifty five QOU EFL students in Qalqilya. Fifty two copies were returned. For data analysis, the researcher used SPSS version 10.0.

### *Reliability of the Instrument*

The researcher used Crombach Alpha to estimate the reliability of the questionnaire. It was found that the reliability of the instrument was (0.76). Such value is suitable for the purpose of the study.

*Validity of the instrument*

The researcher distributed the questionnaire on a number of experts from the Faculty of Education at the QOU. All of them had approved its suitability for the purpose of the current study. Just a few slips in typing were changed. Generally, and according to Horwitz (1986, 2001) the FLCAS has been extensively validated for internal reliability, test-retest reliability, and construct validity.

**Results and discussion**

The following section deals with the results of the study. Positive items were given (5) points for (strongly agree), (4) points for (agree), (3) points for (neutral), (2) points for (disagree) and (1) points for (strongly disagree). Table (3) shows such scale.

**Table (3):** Responses' percentage scale.

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

In the following sections the researcher displays the results related to the questions of the study.

Results related to the first question which states "What is the level of QOU students' EFL learning anxiety?"

Generally speaking, the results of descriptive analyses showed that there were 25 items whose means were above 3.00 (ranging between medium and high) which indicated that the QOU students had the feeling of anxiety.

This question shows the general situation of QOU students concerning their level of anxiety. To answer this question, means and percentages were used for each item in the questionnaire domains.

Tables (4, 5, 6 & 7) show the results, where table (8) shows the ranks of domains.

**Table (4):** Means and percentages of QOU students level of EFL learning anxiety on the first domain (communicative apprehension).

No.	Items	Means*	Percentage	Level
1.	I never feel quite sure of myself when I am speaking in English.	3.31	66.20	Medium
2.	I start to panic when I have to speak without preparation in language class.	3.56	71.20	High
3.	I would be nervous speaking the English language with native speakers.	3.08	61.60	Medium
4.	I feel confident when I speak in English in my language class.	3.17	63.40	Medium
5.	I feel very self-conscious about speaking English in front of the other students.	3	60.00	Medium
6.	I get nervous and confused when I am speaking in my language class.	3.21	64.20	Medium
7.	I get nervous when I don't understand every word the language teacher says.	3.27	65.40	Medium
8.	I would not probably feel comfortable around native speakers of the English language.	4.02	80.40	Very high
*	<b>Total score</b>	<b>3.33</b>	<b>66.55</b>	<b>Medium</b>

\*maximum point of response is (5) points.

Table (4) shows that the level of language learning anxiety of the EFL learners at AL-Quds Open University – Qalqilia educational region, was very high on item (8), as its response was (80.40%). Such results indicate that QOU students would be nervous if they had to interact with native speakers of English language. The researcher attributed such results to the fact that there is a lack of interaction and communication with native speakers and even with foreigners. Another fact could be the nature of the teaching – learning processes in the Palestinian schools and universities which are, through observation, do not use the communicative methods to develop the students speaking skills. In other words, schools and universities do not teach students to use the language, rather EFL teachers tend to explain structures and reading texts traditionally. Another fact is that the usage of the English language in the Palestinian context. English language is only used in English classes at schools and universities. This means that English is not used outside classrooms and creates a source of language anxiety for its learners. The level of EFL learning anxiety was also high on the item (2), as its percentage was (71.20%). This result confirms the previous one in the way it explains the fear of students to speak up naturally in the class without preparation. The responses were medium on the items (1, 3, 4, 5, 6, and 7); the percentages of responses were between (60.00-66.00 %), also the total score was medium, as its percentage was (66.55%).

Such results support the previous results. For example, the first result indicated that QOU students are nervous of interacting with native speakers; this explains the medium responses on items 1,3,4,6 and 7 which imply that QOU students' lacked self confidence when speaking in the EFL class, experienced nervousness when speaking with native speakers, and even in class in front of their colleagues as item 6 in the table above shows "*I get nervous and confused when I am speaking in my language class*". These results agree with Liu and Jackson (2008) who found that language anxiety was positively correlated with unwillingness to communicate, but negatively with language class risk-taking, and language class sociability. Another study concluded nearly the same as the present study results, where results revealed that over 50% of the students reported experiencing moderate or high levels of speaking anxiety (Tianjian, 2010) and Nahavandi and Mukundan (2013).

**Table (5):** Means and percentages of QOU students level of EFL learning anxiety on the second domain (Fear of negative evaluation).

No.	Items	Means*	Percentage	Level
9.	I tremble when I know that I'm going to be called on in language class.	3.1	62.00	Medium
10.	I keep thinking that the other students are better at language than I am.	2.96	59.20	Low
11.	It embarrasses me to volunteer answers in my language class.	2.87	57.40	Low
12.	I get upset when I don't understand what the teacher is correcting.	3.56	71.20	High
13.	I can feel my heart pounding when I'm going to be called on in language class.	2.88	57.60	Low
14.	I always feel that the other students speak English language better than I do.	3.04	60.80	Medium
15.	Language class moves so quickly I worry about getting left behind.	2.75	55.00	Low
16.	I am afraid that the other students in the class will laugh at me when I speak in English.	2.49	49.80	Very low
17.	I get nervous when the language teacher asks questions which I haven't prepared in advance.	3.19	63.80	Medium
*	Total score	2.98	59.64	low

\* Maximum point of response is (5) points.



Table (5) indicates that the responses of the EFL learners at Al-Quds Open University –Qalqilya educational region, were high on the item (12) as its percentage was (71.20%), it was medium on the items (9, 14, 17), as its percentage was between (60-69%), it was low on the items (10,11,13,15) as its percentage was between (50-59%) and it was very low on the item (16), as its response level was (49.80%). The total score was low, as its percentage was (59.64 %).

Based on the results of the study, it is concluded that QOU students feel that they are not able to make the intended and proper social impression. The fear of being evaluated by others could have been involved in the process to some extent. In this regard, we could appreciate among the students of this group that their fear of being evaluated by the teacher was not as big as their fear of being evaluated by their classroom mates: the percentage was high on the item (12) as its percentage was (71.20%). This indicates that students were afraid that the teacher was ready to correct every mistake they made. Consequently, EFL lecturers at the QOU should re-consider when to correct students' mistakes. When some students compared themselves with the other students the percentages were medium on the items (9, 14, 17), as its percentage was between (60-69%), the students had a permanent feeling that other students who spoke the foreign language better than they did, as it is clear in item 14 which is: *I always feel that the other students speak English language better than I do*. On the other hand, the students showed their disagreement with the statement "*I am afraid that the other students in the class will laugh at me when I speak in English*". These results disagree with Na's (2007) who found that the fear of being negatively evaluated ranked the highest among EFL students in her study.

**Table (6):** Means and percentages of QOU students level of EFL learning anxiety on the third domain (Test anxiety).

No.	Items	Means*	Percentage	Level
18.	I worry about making mistakes in language class.	3.38	67.60	Medium
19.	I am usually at ease (comfortable) during tests in my language class.	2.81	56.20	Low
20.	I worry about the consequences of failing my language class.	3.37	67.40	Medium
21.	I am afraid that my language teacher is ready to correct every mistake I make.	3.17	63.40	Medium
22.	The more I study for a language test, the more confused I get	2.58	51.60	Low
*	<b>Total score</b>	<b>3.06</b>	<b>61.24</b>	<b>Medium</b>

\*The maximum point of response is (5) points.

Table (6) shows that the responses of the EFL learners were medium on the items (18, 20, 21) as its total score was between (60-69%), it was low on the items (19, 22), as its response level were between (50-59%). The total score was medium, as its percentage was (61.24%).

Nonetheless, the most critical level of classroom anxiety was exhibited by those items related to the phenomenon of test anxiety. As seen in item 19, students denied being usually at ease during tests in their language class. This piece of data was most probably related to the fact that students were worried about the consequences of failing the subject, as items 18, 20, 21 show. According to previous studies (Horwitz, 2001) test anxiety is an apprehension over academic evaluation. It is considered as a fear of failing in test situations. It is also stated that test anxiety is a type of anxiety concerning apprehension over academic

evaluation which comes from a fear of failure. Another study agreed with such results conducted by Aydin and Yavuz (2006) found that “EFL learners experienced some English language learning anxiety on two anxiety level measures, fear of negative evaluation and test anxiety, which were also positively correlated” (p. 147).

**Table (7):** Means and percentages of QOU students level of EFL learning anxiety on the fourth domain (EFL Class Anxiety).

No.	Items	Means*	Percentage	Responses degree
23.	It frightens me when I don't understand what the teacher is saying in the English language.	3.52	70.40	High
24.	It wouldn't bother me at all to take more English language classes.	3.13	62.60	Medium
25.	During a language class, I find myself thinking about things that have nothing to do with the course	3.15	63.00	Medium
26.	I don't understand why some people get so upset over language classes.	3.37	67.40	Medium
27.	In a language class, I can get so nervous I forget things I know.	3.96	79.20	High
28.	Even if I am well prepared for a language class, I feel anxious about it.	3.37	67.40	Medium
29.	I often feel like not going to my language class.	2.96	59.20	Low

...continue table (7)

No.	Items	Means*	Percentage	Responses degree
30.	I don't feel pressure to prepare very well for language class.	3	60.00	Medium
31.	I feel more tense and nervous in my language class than in my other classes	3.37	67.40	Medium
32.	When I'm on my way to a language class, I feel very sure and relaxed	2.96	59.20	Low
33.	I feel overwhelmed by the number of rules you have to learn to speak the English language.	3.35	67.00	Medium
*	<b>Total score</b>	<b>3.29</b>	<b>65.71</b>	<b>medium</b>

\*Maximum point of response is (5) points.

Table (7) shows that the responses were high on the items (23, 27) as their scores were between (70-79%), it was medium on the items (24, 25, 26, 28, 30, 31, 33), for its total score was between (60-69%), it was low on the items (29, 32), as its response was between (50-59%). The total score was medium, as its percentage was (65.71%). The figures from table 7 indicate that most of this domain's items scored moderate and high levels of anxiety, except item number 32 (*When I'm on my way to language class, I feel very sure and relaxed*) which is negative in its meaning because it implies that students do not feel relaxed and confident when they attend an EFL classroom. This is to say that if item 32 is recoded it will score higher.

### Ranks of domains

From the computation of means and percentages of the different anxiety domains, it was found that the three domains and the total score ranked medium. Such ranks indicated that QOU students experience anxiety. QOU students' communicative apprehension, the mean of which reached 3.33, was especially serious.

**Table (8):** Means and percentages of QOU student's level of EFL learning anxiety on the domains and Responses' total score.

No.	Domain	Means*	Percentages	Ranks
1.	Communicative apprehension	3.33	66.55	Medium
2.	Fear of negative evaluation	2.98	59.64	Low
3.	Test anxiety	3.06	61.24	Medium
4.	Class anxiety	3.29	65.71	Medium
*	<b>Total score</b>	<b>3.17</b>	<b>63.28</b>	<b>Medium</b>

\*maximum point of response is (5) points.

Table (8) shows that language anxiety of EFL learners at AL-Quds Open University –Qalqilia educational region was medium on the domains (1, 3&4) for their levels were between (60-69%), but it was low on the second domain as its percentage was between (50-59%). Concerning the total score, the responses were medium, as the percentage was (63.28%).

Based on the ranks of the domains, it could be safely said that communication apprehension ranked medium because students felt panic when they had to speak without preparation in the EFL class as communicative apprehension as a type of shyness felt when communicating with people, and manifests itself through anxiety. Additionally, students would probably feel uncomfortable when they came into contact with native speakers of English language. Consequently, this led to a medium rank of their fear of negative evaluation.

The researcher attributed such results to the fact that in any educational system the demands on students normally get bigger as their knowledge increases as is the case at the QOU. Thus, there is the possibility that students may perceive an imbalance between their own linguistic skills and those required in order to succeed in the tasks undertaken in class at any stage of inter-language development, and not only at elementary levels. The researcher also attributed the existence of anxiety to the students' English proficiency, which was not high enough to allow them to communicate with others freely, express themselves adequately in class and answer teachers' questions properly. So, in English classrooms, where much communication is needed, QOU students are more anxious than in other classes. This is because students at QOU are not accustomed to use English communicatively, and so they will be hesitant to speak in English classes in front of their colleagues.

#### **The comparison of QOU students' EFL learning anxiety:**

Does gender have an influence on QOU EFL learning anxiety? Table (9) shows the results of this question.

**Table (9):** Results of the T-test according to gender variable.

No.	Domain	male		female		(T)	SIG
		M	S.D.	M	S.D.		
1.	Communicative apprehension	3.32	0.74	3.34	0.53	-0.11	0.91
2.	Fear of negative evaluation	2.83	0.85	3.21	0.64	-1.74	0.09
3.	Test anxiety	3.01	0.57	3.14	0.75	-0.75	0.46
4.	Class anxiety	3.10	0.50	3.55	0.55	-3.07	0.00 *
*	<b>Total score</b>	<b>3.07</b>	<b>0.46</b>	<b>3.31</b>	<b>0.44</b>	<b>-1.94</b>	<b>0.06</b>

\*Statistically significant at ( $\alpha=0.05$ ).

Table (9) shows that there were no significant differences at ( $\alpha=0.05$ ) in language anxiety for the EFL learners at AL-Quds Open University –

Qalqilia educational region due to gender variable at the domains (1, 2, 3) and at the total score. Meanwhile, there were significant differences in language anxiety of the EFL learners at AL-Quds Open University on EFL class anxiety (the fourth domain) in favor of the female students, where (T) value was (0.00\*). The researcher attributed such results to the nature of female students. Female students tend to be more shy and hesitant in front of others than males. Consequently, male students tend to be more daring than females. The present result agrees with Aydin and others (2006) who concluded that female learners feel more worried, although they prepare more than males. Also, Mahmood and Iqbal (2010) concluded that both male and female students were feeling foreign language anxiety, but females showed more foreign language anxiety than males. Male students who fall in average level of foreign language anxiety showed better results than high level of anxiety regarding academic achievement. Female students who also fall in the average level of foreign language anxiety showed better results than a high level of foreign language anxiety regarding academic achievement. Tianjian (2010), on the other hand, found out that there were no significant differences between males and females in speaking anxiety.

The present study results disagree with Na's (2007) whose study indicated that males have a higher anxiety of English classes than females. Na's study also found that high anxiety plays a somewhat debilitating role in high school students' language learning. Moreover, a huge body of research indicated that contact with the target language culture and community or people could reduce anxiety (Tang, 2005 cited in Na (2007)).

Although the world is now a small village, most English learners, especially university students, seldom have opportunities to communicate with native speakers of English. Thus, university students tend to experience more anxiety in English classrooms. Moreover, most Palestinian universities overwhelmingly emphasize reading and writing, while paying less attention to listening and speaking.

According to Liu (2006), the existence of anxiety in English classrooms can also be ascribed to classroom atmosphere. In most

Palestinian EFL classrooms, teachers play the role of controllers or dominators; it is a traditional class. Students usually feel nervous, passive or oppressed. Consequently, they lack a free, relaxed environment for English learning. Finally, another factor that cannot be overlooked is the high expectations of Palestinian parents for their sons and daughters; high expectations usually do not encourage students, but often result in more anxiety.

Concerning the results related to the third question, which asks if there are any significant differences in the EFL learners anxiety due to the students' academic level at AL-Quds Open University –Qalqilia educational region?

To answer this question the researcher used One-way ANOVA, as table (10) shows the results.

**Table (10):** Results of the One-way ANOVA due to academic level variable.

No	Domain	Source of variance	Sum of squares	D F	Mean square	F	SIG
1.	Communicative apprehension	Between groups	.280	3	.093	.206	.892
		within groups	21.756	48	.453		
		Total	22.036	51			
2.	Fear of negative evaluation	Between groups	4.873	3	1.624	2.920	.143
		within groups	26.698	48	.556		
		Total	31.572	51			
3.	Test anxiety	Between groups	1.654	3	.551	1.368	.264
		within groups	19.349	48	.403		
		Total	21.003	51			



... continue table (10)

No	Domain	Source of variance	Sum of squares	D F	Mean square	F	SIG
4.	Class anxiety	Between groups	.622	3	.207	.641	.592
		within groups	15.511	48	.323		
		Total	16.133	51			
*Total score		Between groups	.859	3	.286	1.364	.265
		Within groups	10.172	48	.210		
		Total	10.931	51			

ANOVA ( $\alpha=0.05$ )

Table (10) shows no significant differences at ( $\alpha=0.05$ ) in language anxiety of EFL learners at AL-Quds Open University – Qalqilia educational region due to the academic level variable at all dimensions and the total score.

The researcher attributed such results to the nature of the teaching-learning process at the QOU. In other words, students at QOU learn and are instructed via e-and open learning, so they share the same circumstances. Also, maturation is a key factor here, in other words, students at this stage are not in a critical stage of language learning. Moreover, the questionnaires were distributed at the beginning of the semester when students were not under the stress of exams and testing.

### Conclusions and recommendations

This research has presented some findings of QOU students' anxiety in Palestinian EFL classroom. It was found that most students experienced anxiety in classrooms, especially the fear of communication with native speakers of English. Female students were found to have a higher anxiety of English classes than males, especially in classroom

anxiety. Moreover, it was also found that anxiety is a debilitator in language learning, especially anxiety of tests and English classes.

Based on the above findings, some recommendations can be:

1. QOU English language lecturers should take the affective factors of students into consideration. For example, a relaxed classroom atmosphere may encourage English language learners to feel safe to speak or express their views in English.
2. QOU English language lecturers should avoid negative evaluation of students in classrooms and comment on students' behaviors with more encouragement.
3. QOU English language lecturers should take some measures to relax students' tension during exams. For example, talking for five minutes with the students who sit for the exam encouraging them that the exam is easy and it is not the end of the world.
4. If possible, QOU English language supervisors are advised to invite guest speakers who are native speakers to interact with students. If not, the lecturer him/herself can consolidate speaking and communication skills through role-play and implementing drama in their classes.
5. Teachers may give learners consistent rewards for their speaking performance and contribution. Fear of communication could result from painful experiences related to communication. The effect of positive reinforcement or reward can be justified by behaviorism. A huge body of research has shown that pleasant consequences following a behavior are most likely to facilitate the behavior.

For further studies, as the study was only conducted in one educational region, more research is needed to support the findings, and to find out more about other students' anxiety in English classrooms in other QOU educational regions. Also, further studies

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