



## English Language Learning Anxiety in Online and Face-to-Face Classes

**Behnam Behforouz**

*University of Technology and Applied Sciences, Shinas, Oman*

**Marilyn C. Gallema**

*University of Technology and Applied Sciences, Shinas, Oman*

**Rhona Maria A. Waga**

*University of Technology and Applied Sciences, Shinas, Oman*

**Saif Al Weshahi**

*University of Technology and Applied Sciences, Shinas, Oman*

To measure the amount, type of anxiety, and gender differences in foreign language classes through online and face-to-face studies, 80 Omani EFL learners were randomly selected to participate in the current research. The adapted version of the Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (FLCAS) questionnaire was distributed among the face-to-face participants, and Foreign Language Virtual Classroom Anxiety Scale (FLVCAS) among the online students. To ensure the practicality of the aforementioned questionnaires, the reliability of both tests was measured in depth. Whereas the students who participated in face-to-face classes stated some low degree of anxiety, the degree was insignificant compared to their online counterparts. In the case of gender, during the online classes, students did not show any difference based on the anxiety; however, through face-to-face learning, the female students experienced a low amount of anxiety.

**Keywords:** English language learning, online, face-to-face, anxiety

### Introduction

Based on a psychological viewpoint, Freud (as cited in Weiner & Craighead, 2010) described anxiety as something that can be felt, which refers to the feeling of consciousness, tension, and concerns that is accompanied by some psychological intoxication. Koba et al. (2000) and Ohata (2005) defined anxiety as a type of anxious feeling because of the things or ideas that are threatening. The point that can be understood from these definitions is that anxiety can have psychological and biological effects that are non-controllable and non-predictable. Anxiety can affect the brain's function due to the feeling of accommodating oneself to another environment. In addition, anxiety can be divided into two types, facilitating and debilitating, which act concurrently to either motivate or threaten the students (Demirdas & Bozdogan, 2013). According to Scovel (1978), lessening anxiety refers to the motivational feeling that makes the learners handle the difficulty of new assignments and improves them emotionally for the



consent behavior. On the contrary, debilitating anxiety is a sense of discouragement, which stops the learners from the assignments' interpretations and leads to avoidance behavior stabilized in an individual's emotional state.

To Ohata (2005), anxiety is divided into three types: state, trait, and language. The first type of anxiety, state anxiety, occurs under the specific situations and conditions that a learner experiences. The second type of anxiety, trait anxiety or General one (Ozuturk & Hursen, 2013), occurs when the learner faces difficult situations that bring him tension and anxiousness. Worde (1998) states that this type of anxiety is associated with personal characteristics and is considered a stable disorder. The third type of anxiety, so-called language anxiety, is the one that is connected to second language learning exposures, which can be the results of various resources (Otaha, 2005; Skehan, 1989; Young, 1991).

The measurement of the correlation between language learning and anxiety goes back to the 1970s, but during the recent 20 years, the number of research studies in this area has increased (Zahid Javid, 2014). This increment can be split into two categories as follow: the first type of study tries to measure the impact of anxiety on English language learning either as a second or foreign language (Abu-Ghararah, 1999; Alghothami, 2010; Al-Shboul et al., 2013; Awan et al., 2010; Bailey, 1983; Batumlu & Erden, 2007; Burden, 2004; Hauck & Hurd, 2005; Liu & Huang, 2011; Sanchez-Herrero & Sanchez, 1992). The second type of research study attempts to analyze the correlation of anxiety with various language skills such as listening, reading, writing, and speaking (Bailey et al., 2000; Burden, 2004; Casdado & Dereshiwsky, 2004; Cheng, 2004; Horwitz, 2001; Horwitz et al., 1986; Sanchez-Herrero & Sanchez, 1992). However, among all of the aforementioned studies stated above, the one by Horwitz et al. (1986) plays a very important role in identifying and measuring the foreign language anxiety since the group designed a type of Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (FLCAS) which has been implemented as the main element in plenty of studies in this field (Zahid Javid, 2014).

Anxiety in learning a foreign language process is merged with some other negative consequences that can be considered psychological, physical, and social problems (Andrade & Williams, 2009; Bailey, 1983; Daly, 1991; Onwuegbuzie, 1999; Oxford, 1999; Uzun, 2012; Yarahmadi, 2011; Yazdanpanah et al., 2010). The psychological side of anxiety can be associated with fear, lack of memory recall, defenselessness, and awkwardness. Physical symptoms can be associated with a fast rate of heartbeat, sweating, and a dry mouth. Finally, social symptoms are associated with the unwillingness to engage, frequency of absences, and course withdrawal (Ozturk & Hursen, 2013). The aforementioned symptoms will surely affect the learners' performance, leading to low achievement (Andrade & Williams, 2009; Kondo & Ying-Ling, 2004; Tuncay & Uzunboylu, 2010).

In 1991, Young clarified six sources of language anxiety as follow: personal and interpersonal, the beliefs of the learners toward learning a language, the ideas of the teachers regarding language teaching, the interaction pattern between teacher and student, the procedures in the classrooms, and finally the tests of language. In addition, in some other research studies, various sources of anxiety were distinguished. The first one is the motivation of learning (Ryan & Deci, 2002). The second was the learners' beliefs regarding acquiring a language (Gregersen, 2003; Horwitz, 1986). The other resources include the personal characteristics (Ehrman & Oxford, 1990; 1995), the communication patterns of teachers with students (Vygotsky, 1986), language background (Frantzen & Magnan, 2005), and finally, the group cooperation during the learning process (Slavin, 1991). Maharani and Roslaini (2021) believe that learning the English language is considered a complex skill, and this causes frequent anxiety among the students. Badrasawi et al. (2020) stated that learning anxiety has two sources: the linguistic and non-linguistic sides. In the former, students carry stress whenever they make grammatical errors that make them worry about the comments they might receive from the teachers. In this case, students are also worried about such grammatical mistakes during speaking. The latter, non-linguistic anxiety, clarifies that the learners cannot speak English publicly due to the negative perceptions they might receive from their audience (Maharani & Roslaini, 2021).

Moreover, other research studies attempted to measure the negative correlations of anxiety in a foreign language with the learners' achievements based on factors such as age, the length of the study, sex, and

the living or traveling experience in the foreign language environments. In all of these studies, the interaction and the relation between language anxiety and achievement were impacted by the number of the learners' social and environmental factors (Gregerson & Horwitz, 2002; Kitano, 2001; Onwuegbuzie et al., 1997).

According to Nurfirdaus and Mohd (2019), many studies have been done to measure language anxiety. Although plenty of these research studies show the negative effect of anxiety on the process of language acquisition (Gregersen, 2003; MacIntyre & Gardner, 1991; Price, 1991), on the contrary, some other studies by several researchers (Cheng, 2002; Ewald, 2007; Horwitz et al., 1986) reveal the positive impact of anxiety and learner's achievement. Hismanoglu (2013) stated that the nature of the language, which is confusing and complicated, made various researchers yield different results. In addition, Nurfirdaus and Mohd (2019) stated that there is a shortage of empirical research studies dealing with the strategies for controlling foreign language anxiety.

## **Review of Related Literature**

### **Foreign Language Anxiety (FLA)**

Previously, the focus of language learning and teaching was on teachers and their teaching materials; however, there is a movement from those to the EFL learners. This shift has considered the foreign language anxiety as one of the essential affective factors in EFL acquisition (Yan, 2010)

Anxiety is viewed as the primary inhibitor in learning a foreign language (Lamia, 2018). Language anxiety is relatively high, especially during the speaking sessions, because the student might not be familiar with the words and utterances of the new language (Zhang & Rahimi, 2014). Ellis (2006) called this term Foreign Language Anxiety (FLA). Horwitz et al. (1986) described anxiety as a predicting factor in foreign language learning.

The anxiety of a foreign language is a transparent compound of feelings, beliefs, perceptions, and behavior toward communicating in a foreign language classroom. Because anxiety has been considered an affective element during the learning process, thus, various research studies have been done to cover this topic since the 1970s. Those research studies mainly focused on the reasons for showing anxiety in the language learning process (Abrar et al., 2016).

FLA is always categorized as situation-specific rather than trait anxiety (Al-Saraj, 2014). Ellis (2008) stated that the term anxiety, which is situational in education, could be speaking in public, in class, and the exam completion. Gardner & MacIntyre (1993) stated that the anxiety in language learning depends on the situation. He continued that his type of anxiety occurs when the student needs to use the new language in unfamiliar situations. Al-Saraj (2014) stated that anxiety-related symptoms could be misconstrued for lack of interest in class or incentive to learn.

Regarding the direct relation of Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety (FLCA) to academic achievement, many studies have scrutinized the direct connection between academic achievement and language anxiety (Botes et al., 2020). Horwitz (2001) and MacIntyre (1995a, 1995b) defended the FLCA, saying that FLCA is an independent construct, distinct from aptitude, that can affect the language learning performance of the learners. In contrast, some studies (Sparks & Ganchow, 1995, 2007; Sparks et al., 2009) questioned the FLCA as an independent construct in language learning and claimed anxiety is just a natural result of learning difficulties or deficits.

Trang et al. (2013) stated that students' anxiety in EFL classes arises from four different sources: student-related factors, instructor-related factors, external ones, and finally, the English language complications.

## Online and Traditional Classrooms Anxiety

According to Davies and Graft (2005), online classes do not put tremendous pressure to get better results. Thus, learners achieve better marks in online classes than in traditional classrooms. Face-to-face communication makes them feel more apprehensive than any other method of communication. Shahi (2016), in his study, argued that a multimedia learning environment might lower the students' anxiety so that the classroom will be less stressful. Shahi (2016) also states that email feedback allows a teacher to expand the ideas in-group and individually, inquire better questions, and give examples and remarks concurrently.

McNeil (2014) believed that more comfortable interaction and feedback are made possible through electronic tools like Skype, FB Group, Video calls, WhatsApp, Messenger, and many more. In addition, Lamia (2018) confirmed that the level of anxiety is minimal when studying a foreign language in an asynchronous computer-mediated learning environment.

Ward et al. (2009) stated that there are some occasions when the students feel comfortable inside traditional classes. One of these situations is that students may feel uncomfortable and nervous using the electronic platform during language learning. Such students prefer to continue their learning through face-to-face classes. Beard et al. (2004) stated that although online learning is increasing daily, most learners register and enroll in face-to-face courses because they feel they can achieve better and more via communication with their peers and teachers.

Grant et al. (2013) examined learners of Monash University in their online 3D Virtual world simulation and their face-to-face learning environment. They said that both in the face-to-face and virtual learning, there were FLA factors experienced by the students, but in terms of language use, the virtual environment was less stressful.

Presently, there are contrasting views regarding which environment (online or traditional) provokes FLA. Kaiser and Chowdhury (2020), through detailed interviews, found that 9 out of 12 students accepted online learning environment arouse their anxiety because such study channels are dominated by the teacher and students' interaction in online learning is less, unbeneficial, and uncomfortable, more so, they are afraid that their language learning achievements would decrease. In contrast, Pichette (2009) said that students feel less anxious because there is no peer interaction.

Yaniafari and Rihardini (2021), in their comparative study between face-to-face and online speaking practice, found that learners are less anxious during online speaking class (48.41%) compared to face-to-face (60.96%). However, Kotter et al. (1999) claimed that when students prepare what to say in an online class or even read it out, it shows a lack of spontaneity in language use. Thus, it cannot be considered successful language learning.

## Anxiety and Gender

According to Brown (2007), some personal characteristics such as anxiety, gender, communication willingness, and shyness are among the factors that may affect the achievements in learning a new language. Brown (2000) also stated that gender as a psychological feature plays an important and critical role in language learning. Some scholars (Bashosh et al., 2013; Gerencheal, 2016; Jebreil et al., 2015; Zhao, 2007) have investigated the role of anxiety among male and female participants in various studies and found some inconsistent results. Mohtasham and Farnia (2017) stated that gender is considered a critical feature essential in learning a foreign language. They also said that females might carry more anxiety in language learning (Naghadeh et al., 2014; Park & French, 2013); however, some contradictory studies, such as Lian and Budin (2014), showed that male students are more anxious during the language learning process. Meanwhile, few research studies revealed no gender difference in the anxiety level of language learners (Alsowat, 2016; Bell & McCallum, 2012).

Wu and Tsai (2006) consider that gender differences will always be essential in language learning. Ezzi (2012) conducted a study involving Yemeni EFL learners at Hodeida University to measure their level of

anxiety against their gender, educational status, age, and residence. The findings showed a high level of anxiety in favor of female learners.

A study conducted by Almira et al. (2018) regarding EFL male and female students' perceptions showed that both male and female students felt anxiety during class presentations due to peers and teachers.

Alsowat (2016) did a research study to measure students' anxiety levels in a foreign language class at a university in Saudi Arabia. The results represented a moderate level of anxiety among both male and female students. Campbell (1999) tried to measure the anxiety level of the students for two weeks before and after the beginning of the module. Before the beginning of the course, students of both genders showed a moderate level of anxiety; however, two weeks after the course, the results favored female students, i.e., they were carrying less anxiety than their male counterparts.

A study by Ezzi (2012) in a Yemeni university revealed that female students experience higher levels of anxiety than male students. The same results were repeated in Kamarulzaman et al. (2013) in Malaysia and UKM. The results revealed that female students tolerate more anxiety levels than males.

While learning a foreign language, learners are experiencing lots of issues such as anxiety frequently (Hussin, 2010; Marwan, 2007; Worde, 1998). Abrar et al. (2016) stated that as an example of a non-native country, plenty of teachers and learners have most probably realized that in the language classes, there are silent, and their motivational levels are low. Mukminin et al. (2015) discussed that learning English is a challenge for the learners because they are exposed to complex structures and words during school or college. To acquire a language, the learners should simultaneously lodge the affective and cognitive characteristics to achieve success in the learning process. Anxiety, which is a well-known criterion in the process of language learning, is the leading factor that perhaps controls the performance of the learners (Chastain, 1975; Scott, 1986), and is associated directly to the level of stress and anxiety among the students (Arnold & Brown, 1999; Gardner & MacIntyre, 1993; Oxford, 1999). This issue can be observed frequently in English language learning classes, as the learners need to think and speak at the same time (Abrar et al., 2016).

Based on the above literature review, it might be claimed that the main focus of the previous research was on single skills of English learning, such as listening, rather than considering the whole EFL learning process. Wilang and Vo (2018) stated that the nature of anxiety in foreign language learning and the teaching process is challenging to measure. Since there is not enough literature on this topic in Omani EFL context, the current research can be considered a practical resource in foreign language anxiety in Oman. It will provide a better view and reveal valuable information regarding the stress among Omani EFL learners. The current research study is trying to find out the answer to the following research questions:

1. Do Omani EFL learners experience anxiety in face-to-face and online language learning classes?
2. Is there any significant difference between Omani male and female EFL learners and their anxiety levels in online classes?
3. Is there any significant difference between Omani male and female EFL learners and their anxiety levels in face-to-face classes?

## **Methodology**

### **Participants**

In this study, 80 Omani EFL learners were selected as the study sample through random sampling. These students were studying English under General Foundation Program (GFP) in two contexts of Online and face-to-face at Shinas University of Technology and Applied Sciences in Oman. Due to the university policy, the placement test as an entry test to the university level was removed that semester, so

the students were located in their levels either through their scores in high school or based on successful completion of the previous semester.

The first research group included 40 students (18 females and 22 males). These students came directly from high school to university after graduation, and it was their first experience of language learning at the university level. Following policy, this group of students should spend the whole semester in-campus studying through face-to-face classes. The age range of the students was between 18 and 19 years old.

The second research group included 40 students (20 females and 20 males). These students were studying online through Microsoft Teams and were off-campus. This group experienced online learning in the previous semester due to Covid19 restrictions.

All participants were Omani, and they spoke Arabic as their mother tongue. It is worth mentioning that students should spend one educational year in GFP before joining their specialization in different departments. Depending on the university, students should take various subjects (English, Math, and IT, among the essential and mandatory modules) during the year.

The final level for Foundation students is level 4 which equals to upper-intermediate Common European Framework. After this period of time, students will be able to know if they are able to continue their bachelor's degree or advanced diploma or they need to repeat the level based on their exam failure. The current students were a mixture of those who wanted to study business or engineering as their majors. To improve their computer literacy, IT modules are implemented accordingly to train them thoroughly.

## **Research Instruments**

To carry out the present study, the following instruments were used:

### **Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (FLCAS)**

The first instrument which was used for this study was the Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (FLCAS) which was originally developed by Horwitz et al. (1986). The questionnaire included 33 statements to be measured based on the Likert scale (Strongly Agree, Agree, Neutral, Disagree, and Strongly Disagree). The items measured text anxiety, speech anxiety, and the fear of negative evaluation (Mahigir, 2021). Horwitz et al. (1986) stated that the Internal Consistency of FLCAS, based on Cronbach Alpha, was 0.93, and the reliability was measured as 0.83.

The FLCAS has been adapted and shortened in various studies (Dewaele & MacIntyre, 2014; Liu & Huang, 2011) and was translated into different languages, including Thai (Tanielian, 2015), Arabic (Dewaele & Al-Saraj, 2015), Persian (Alidoost et al., 2013) and Hungarian (Toth, 2008).

A number of 25 statements were selected as the final version of the questionnaire to be used in this study. The Arabic translation of the statements was added to facilitate the students' comprehension. The questionnaire mentioned above will be marked based on 5-point Likert Scale (1: strongly Agree, 2: Agree, 3: Neutral, 4: Disagree, 5: Strongly Disagree). In order to measure the reliability of the adapted questionnaire, a pilot study with 20 Omani EFL learners was carried out. The Cronbach's Alpha reliability of the Face-to-Face questionnaire was found to be .76, which shows a rather high-reliability index.

The original questionnaire by Horwitz et al. (1986) is still considered the main instrument for measuring anxiety (Mahigir, 2021; Gerencheal & Mishra, 2019; Paneerselvam & Yamat, 2021).

It is important to mention that a Ph.D. holder of Applied Linguistics who has been working in Oman for quite a long time did the Arabic translation of the questionnaire. After the translation, to check the appropriacy of questions translation, academically and culturally, one of the authors, who is Omani and an Applied Linguist too, reviewed the questionnaire in depth.

## **Foreign Language Virtual Classroom Anxiety Scale**

The second important instrument, which was implemented to get the language learning anxiety data, was the Foreign Language Virtual Classroom Anxiety Scale (FLVCAS), originally designed and developed by Kaiser and Chowdhury (2020). The questionnaire initially included 19 statements. Some statements were revised appropriately based on the research climate, students, and learning procedures. The Arabic translation of the statements was also added to facilitate the students' comprehension.

To check the reliability of the virtual classroom anxiety questionnaire, it was piloted with 20 Omani EFL learners. The reliability was revealed to be 0.88, which showed a reliable source of research.

Like the previous questionnaire, an Arab Applied Linguist, who has experience working in the Omani academic context for a long period, did the translation. One of the Omani authors of this article measured the suitability of questions and the translation.

## **Google Form**

The other instrument of the study was Google Form. The Foreign Language Virtual Classroom Anxiety Scale was designed on Google Form, as a group of participants was online at the time of the study.

## **Microsoft Teams**

Microsoft Teams was used as another instrument for conducting the current research. Since one group of participants were studying online to conduct virtual anxiety, the link to the questionnaire was communicated via Microsoft Teams.

## **Ethical Considerations**

To guarantee the integrity of the current research study, the following procedures were implemented. The request for permission to do the study was sent to the line manager of the English Language Center firstly. It was approved accordingly. When the questionnaires were designed, it was mentioned that this is a voluntary act, and the participation of students will not affect their marks in any way within the semester. They were also given the chance not to participate in the answering process if they did not want to. The personal identifications of the participants, such as full names and Identity Numbers, were removed too, and the questionnaires remained anonymous.

## **Procedures**

The current study was conducted during the first semester (Fall Semester) of Academic Year 2021-2022 at University of Technology and Applied Sciences in Shinas, Oman. To collect the data dealing with the Omani EFL learners' anxiety during their studies within the university, two questionnaires were selected based on the originality of research, reliability, and the availability. The questionnaires were piloted on two different groups of students, virtual and face-to-face groups, based on random sampling.

FLCAS, which was discussed earlier, was for students who started university after high school and experienced face-to-face classes. The researchers randomly selected twenty students, approached their classes, and distributed the questionnaires. Approximately 15 minutes were given to the students to return back the questionnaires.

The other groups of students were those who continued the semester online from their houses. The Foreign Language Virtual Classroom Anxiety Scale questionnaire was designed on Google Form and was sent to the students through Microsoft Teams. Similar time of 15 minutes was considered for them to answer the questionnaire.

## Data Analysis

### Reliability analysis of the online questionnaire in a pilot study

In Table 1, the reliability result of the instrument, which was checked in a pilot study with 20 participants, is shown.

TABLE 1

*The Result of the Reliability Analysis for the Online Questionnaire*

| Cronbach's Alpha | Participants (total) | N of Items |
|------------------|----------------------|------------|
| .889             | 20                   | 15         |

As Table 1 shows, the Cronbach's Alpha reliability of the online questionnaire checklist with 15 items and 20 participants was found to be .88, which shows a rather high-reliability index.

### Reliability analysis of the face-to-face questionnaire in a pilot study

In Table 2, the instrument's reliability result, which was checked in a pilot study with 20 participants, is shown.

TABLE 2

*The Result of the Reliability Analysis for the Face-to-Face Questionnaire*

| Cronbach's Alpha | Participants (total) | N of Items |
|------------------|----------------------|------------|
| 0.767            | 20                   | 25         |

As Table 2 shows, the Cronbach's Alpha reliability of the face-to-face questionnaire with 25 items and 20 participants was found to be .77, which shows a relatively high-reliability index.

## Omani EFL learners and anxiety

**Face-to-Face Group.** The questionnaire included 15 statements to be measured based on the Likert-scale format (Strongly disagree = 1, disagree = 2, Neutral = 3, Agree = 4, and strongly agree = 5). Scores up to 1.66 were considered low; scores from 1.7 up to 3.33 were considered average, and scores from 3.4 up to 5 were considered high.

TABLE 3  
*The Descriptive Statistics for the Face-to-Face Questionnaire*

| N  | Descriptive Statistics  | N   | Minimum | Maximum | Mean    | Status |
|----|---|-----|---------|---------|---------|--------|
| 1  | I never feel quite sure of myself when I am speaking in my foreign language class.          | 401 | 5       | 2.68    | Average |        |
| 2  | I don't worry about making mistakes in language class.                                      | 401 | 5       | 2.82    | Average |        |
| 3  | I tremble when I know that I'm going to be called on in language class.                     | 401 | 5       | 2.80    | Average |        |
| 4  | It frightens me when I don't understand what the teacher is saying in the foreign language. | 401 | 5       | 3.35    | High    |        |
| 5  | It would bother me at all to take more foreign language classes.                            | 401 | 5       | 3.50    | High    |        |
| 6  | I keep thinking that the other students are better at languages than I am.                  | 401 | 5       | 2.70    | Average |        |
| 7  | I am usually at ease during tests in my language class.                                     | 401 | 5       | 3.33    | Average |        |
| 8  | I start to panic when I have to speak without preparation in language class.                | 401 | 5       | 3.22    | Average |        |
| 9  | In language class, I can get so nervous I forget things I know.                             | 401 | 5       | 2.80    | Average |        |
| 10 | It embarrasses me to volunteer answers in my language class.                                | 401 | 5       | 2.72    | Average |        |
| 11 | I would be nervous speaking the foreign language with native speakers.                      | 401 | 5       | 3.42    | High    |        |
| 12 | I get upset when I don't understand what the teacher is correcting.                         | 401 | 5       | 3.70    | High    |        |
| 13 | Even If I am well prepared for language class, I feel anxious about it.                     | 401 | 5       | 3.18    | Average |        |
| 14 | I often feel like not going to my language class.   | 401 | 5       | 2.83    | Average |        |
| 15 | I feel confident when I speak in foreign language class.                                    | 401 | 5       | 3.08    | Average |        |
| 16 | I am afraid that my language teacher is ready to correct every mistake I make.              | 401 | 5       | 3.00    | Average |        |
| 17 | I can feel my heart pounding when I'm going to be called on in language class.              | 401 | 5       | 3.20    | Average |        |
| 18 | I don't feel pressure to prepare very well for language class.                              | 401 | 5       | 3.38    | High    |        |
| 19 | I always feel that the other students speak the foreign language better than I do.          | 401 | 5       | 3.00    | Average |        |
| 20 | I feel very self-conscious about speaking the foreign language in front of other students.  | 401 | 5       | 2.95    | Average |        |
| 21 | Language class moves so quickly I worry about getting left behind.                          | 401 | 5       | 2.57    | Average |        |
| 22 | I feel more tense and nervous in my language class than in my other classes.                | 401 | 5       | 2.32    | Average |        |
| 23 | I get nervous and confused when I am speaking in my language class.                         | 401 | 5       | 2.75    | Average |        |
| 24 | I am afraid that the other students will laugh at me when I speak the foreign language.     | 401 | 5       | 2.98    | Average |        |
| 25 | I get nervous when the language teacher asks questions which I haven't prepared in advance. | 401 | 5       | 3.55    | High    |        |
|    | Valid N (listwise)  | 40  |         |         |         |        |

As can be understood from items 4 (It frightens me when I don't understand what the teacher is saying in the foreign language.), 5 (It would bother me at all to take more foreign language classes.), 11 (I would be nervous speaking the foreign language with native speakers.), 12 (I get upset when I don't understand what the teacher is correcting.), 18 (I don't feel pressure to prepare very well for a language class.), and 25 (I get nervous when the language teacher asks questions which I haven't prepared in advance.) above, the participants showed high anxiety. For the rest of the items, moderate anxiety was observed.

**Online Group.** The questionnaire included 15 statements to be measured based on the Likert-scale format (Strongly disagree = 1, disagree = 2, Neutral = 3, Agree = 4, and strongly agree = 5). Scores up to 1.66 were considered low; scores from 1.7 up to 3.33 were considered average, and scores from 3.4 up to 5 were considered high.

TABLE 4

*The Descriptive Statistics for the Online Questionnaire*

| N  |  | N  | Min | Max | Mean | Status  |
|----|--|----|-----|-----|------|---------|
| 1  | I have experienced virtual classes.<br>الافتراضية  | 40 | 1   | 5   | 3.62 | high    |
| 2  | I have techno-phobia.<br>المرضي.   | 40 | 1   | 5   | 2.07 | Average |
| 3  | It's easier for me to participate in language activities in front of teachers and classmates inside the classroom.<br>الصف في الطلاب و المعلمين امام اللغويه الانشطه في المشاركه على يسعمل   | 40 | 1   | 5   | 4.00 | high    |
| 4  | It is easier for me to participate in the language activities in front of teachers and classmates in an online class.<br>التعليم خلال الطلاب و المعلمين امام اللغويه النشطه في المشاركه على يسعمل بعد عن                                   | 40 | 1   | 5   | 3.65 | High    |
| 5  | I feel myself isolated during virtual class.<br>الافتراضي الدرس خلال   | 40 | 1   | 5   | 2.45 | average |
| 6  | I feel myself much involved during real life class.<br>الواقعية الحياة دروس خلال كثيراً مساهم بأنني أشعر   | 40 | 1   | 5   | 3.35 | High    |
| 7  | I feel anxious thinking that teacher does not see my non-verbal response and seriousness during virtual class.<br>أثناء وجديتي اللفظي غير ردي يرى لا المعلم أن في التفكير من بالقلق أشعر الافتراضي الدرس                                   | 40 | 1   | 5   | 2.95 | average |
| 8  | I feel fear of being recorded for every activity during virtual class.<br>افتراضية حصه خلال نشاط كل تسجيل يتم  | 40 | 1   | 5   | 2.35 | average |
| 9  | I feel safe during virtual class since I do not have to give feedback standing before whole class.<br>وأنا ملاحظات تقديم على يتعين لا حيث الافتراضي الدرس أثناء بالأمان أشعر بإكماله الدرس أمام أفق  | 40 | 1   | 5   | 3.33 | Average |
| 10 | Since I do not have to expose my physical appearance in virtual class, I feel comfortable, anxiety-free and relaxed here.<br>الدرس في الجسدي مظهري عن الكشف إلى مضطراً لست أنني بما هنا والاسترخاء القلق من وخالية بالراحة أشعر الافتراضي، | 40 | 1   | 5   | 3.43 | High    |
| 11 | Direct presence or eye contact of the teachers makes me more nervous than virtual environment.<br>الواقع من توترأ أكثر يجعلني للمعلمين البصري التواصل أو المباشر الوجود الافتراضي  | 40 | 1   | 5   | 2.62 | average |
| 12 | Virtual classroom setting makes me feel more suffocated than real classroom.<br>الفصول إعداد يجعلني الحقيقي الدرس من أكثر بالاختناق أشعر الافتراضية الدراسية   | 40 | 1   | 5   | 2.78 | Average |
| 13 | Real classroom setting makes me feel more suffocated than real classroom.<br>الإعداد يجعلني الحقيقي الدرس من أكثر بالاختناق أشعر الدراسية للفصول الحقيقي   | 40 | 1   | 4   | 2.57 | Average |
| 14 | Real classroom environment fits me more for language class.<br>اللغة لدرس بالنسبة أكثر تناسبني الحقيقي   | 40 | 1   | 5   | 3.58 | high    |
| 15 | Virtual classroom environment fits me more for language class.<br>الفصول بيئة اللغة لفصول أكثر تناسبني الافتراضية  | 40 | 1   | 5   | 3.05 | average |
|    | Valid N (listwise)   | 40 |     |     |      |         |

As can be understood from the items above, items 1 (I have experienced virtual classes.), 3 (I feel easy to participate in the language activities in front of teachers and classmates in real classroom.), 4 (I feel easy to participate in the language activities in front of teachers and classmates in virtual classroom), 6 (I feel myself much involved during real life class.), 10 (Since I do not have to expose my physical appearance in virtual class, I feel comfortable, anxiety-free and relaxed here.), and 14 (Real classroom environment fits me more for language class.) received high marks, but they do not show that the participants experienced anxiety. For the rest of the items, average anxiety scores were observed.

## Gender differences and online classes

Table 5 below shows the result of the normality test for selecting the appropriate inferential test.

TABLE 5  
*The Test of Normality for Males and Females in the Online Groups*

|                | gender | Kolmogorov-Smirnov <sup>a</sup> |    |       | Shapiro-Wilk |    |      |
|----------------|--------|---------------------------------|----|-------|--------------|----|------|
|                |        | Statistic                       | df | Sig.  | Statistic    | df | Sig. |
| Anxiety_Online | boy    | .116                            | 24 | .200* | .956         | 24 | .370 |
|                | girl   | .182                            | 16 | .165  | .937         | 16 | .315 |

The result of the Kolmogorov-Smirnov test of normality shows that the data are normally distributed for the two sets ( $p > .05$ ). Therefore, the appropriate test for mean comparison would be the Independent-Samples *t*-test.

TABLE 6  
*Descriptive Statistics for the Anxiety Scores of Males and Females*

|                | gender | N  | Mean   | Std. Deviation | Std. Error Mean |
|----------------|--------|----|--------|----------------|-----------------|
| Anxiety_Online | boy    | 24 | 45.708 | 7.086          | 1.446           |
|                | girl   | 16 | 45.937 | 4.479          | 1.119           |

The mean and standard deviation of the males and females are 45.70, 7.08, and 45.93, 4.47, respectively. The result of the inferential test is shown below.

TABLE 7  
*The Result of the Independent-Samples T-Test for the Comparison of Males and Females*

|                |                             | Levene's Test for Equality of Variances |      | <i>t</i> -test for Equality of Means |       |                 |                 |                       |
|----------------|-----------------------------|---|------|--------------------------------------|-------|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------------|
|                |                             | <i>F</i>                                | Sig. | <i>t</i>                             | df    | Sig. (2-tailed) | Mean Difference | Std. Error Difference |
| Anxiety_Online | Equal variances assumed     | 2.78                                    | .103 | -.115                                | 38    | .909            | -.229           | 1.997                 |
|                | Equal variances not assumed |   |      | -.125                                | 37.93 | .901            | -.229           | 1.829                 |

Based on Table 7 above, there was not any significant difference between the mean scores of the two groups,  $t(38) = .115, p > .05$ . Therefore, the researcher accepts the related null hypothesis.

## Gender differences and face-to-face classes

Table 8 below shows the result of the normality test for selecting the appropriate inferential test.

TABLE 8  
*The Test of Normality for Males and Females in the Face-to-Face Group*

|             | gender | Kolmogorov-Smirnov <sup>a</sup> |    |       | Shapiro-Wilk |    |      |
|-------------|--------|---------------------------------|----|-------|--------------|----|------|
|             |        | Statistic                       | df | Sig.  | Statistic    | df | Sig. |
| Anxiety_FtF |        | .117                            | 29 | .200* | .964         | 29 | .410 |
|             |        | .142                            | 11 | .200* | .945         | 11 | .579 |

The result of the Kolmogorov-Smirnov test of normality shows that the data are normally distributed for the two sets ( $p > .05$ ). Therefore, the appropriate test for mean comparison would be the Independent-Samples  $t$ -test.

TABLE 9  
*Descriptive Statistics for the Anxiety Scores of Males and Females*

|             | gender | N  | Mean   | Std. Deviation | Std. Error Mean |
|-------------|--------|----|--------|----------------|-----------------|
| Anxiety_FtF | boy    | 29 | 74.103 | 11.96          | 2.221           |
|             | girl   | 11 | 80.363 | 15.19          | 4.581           |

The mean and standard deviation of the males and females are 74.10, 11.96 and 80.36, 15.19, respectively. The result of the inferential test is shown below.

TABLE 10  
*The Result of the Independent-Samples T-Test for the Comparison of Males and Females*

|             |                                   | Levene's Test<br>for Equality of<br>Variances |      | $t$ -test for Equality of Means |       |                     |                    |                          |
|-------------|-----------------------------------|---|------|---------------------------------|-------|---------------------|--------------------|--------------------------|
|             |                                   | $F$   | Sig. | $t$                             | df    | Sig. (2-<br>tailed) | Mean<br>Difference | Std. Error<br>Difference |
| Anxiety_FtF | Equal<br>variances<br>assumed     | 1.50  | .22  | -1.37                           | 38    | .178                | -6.26              | 4.56                     |
|             | Equal<br>variances not<br>assumed |   |      | -1.23                           | 14.96 | .238                | -6.26              | 5.09                     |

Based on Table 10 above, there was not any significant difference between the mean scores of the two groups,  $t(38) = 1.37, p > .05$ . Therefore, the researcher accepts the related null hypothesis.

## Discussion

Anxiety as an affective variable may partially identify if individuals will reach their full potential as language learners (MacIntyre, 1995a). This study was an attempt to find out Omani EFL learners' anxiety in online vs. face-to-face classrooms and answer the research questions. To this end, two groups of students (an online and face-to-face) took part in this study; each group included 40 students.

The first research question was to find out if Omani EFL learners experience anxiety in face-to-face and online language learning classes. The results of the online group revealed that the participants did not experience anxiety. Items 3 (It's easier for me to participate in language activities in front of teachers and classmates inside the classroom) and 4 (It is easier for me to participate in the language activities in front of teachers and classmates in an online class) with high scores show that these learners feel comfortable in both online and face-to-face foreign language classes. Indeed, learners found it helpful to move from the traditional learning model to the e-learning mode. According to Majid et al. (2012), online learning needs a high degree of self-motivation.

There are great numbers of international and national research studies conducted that clearly show that the anxiety experienced by the individuals while learning a foreign language, particularly within the classroom context, interrupts the process of learning and reduces the expected academic success (Aida, 1994; Horwitz et al., 1986; Horwitz, 2001;). The findings are supported by Bashori et al. (2020). Their students showed a moderate-to-serious level of foreign language speaking anxiety, and they believed that web-based language learning could reduce their speaking anxiety. The results are in line with those reported by Majid et al. (2012) that showed learners were not anxious in an online language learning context.

However, the learners in the face-to-face group experienced some degree of anxiety. Items 4, 12, 18, and 25 received high anxiety. It shows that the teacher can act as a source of anxiety in a face-to-face classroom. Students' embarrassment may provoke by the role of their teachers in the class (Horwitz et al., 1986; Price, 1991; Young, 1991). In fact, the teachers' beliefs and attitudes about language teaching and learning, their reaction to the students' errors, and how they create stressful conditions in the class are significantly related to L2 language anxiety (Tanveer, 2007). EFL students believe that the teachers' authoritative, embarrassing, and humiliating attitude toward learners in making mistakes affects learners' cognition and willingness to communicate in class.

Regarding the results obtained, it can be concluded that anxiety as a transitory foreign language learning factor can be changed in different learning contexts. There are possible ways to decrease learners' foreign language anxiety, such as improving their awareness of foreign language anxiety and its symptoms, developing their computer-based communication competency, peer support, and learner autonomy have been suggested. Therefore, anxiety is a labile foreign language learning factor, which can be changed in the new learning context. Accordingly, EFL teachers can reduce learners' foreign language anxiety by considering the aforementioned factors.

The findings of this study are consistent with the results of a study carried out by Yaniafari and Rihardini (2021). They found that, on average, students experienced less anxiety during an online speaking class than in a face-to-face class.

The findings of the second research question indicated no significant difference between Omani male and female EFL learners and their anxiety levels in online classes. This can be due to the growing learning opportunities for female learners, particularly online learning. The findings related to the second research question are supported by Karadeniz's findings (2011). The results of her study showed no significant differences between the achievement level of the students considering the gender and level of test anxiety. However, male EFL learners and those with low test anxiety were more successful in the mobile-based test. The second research question's findings align with a study by Kurniasih et al. (2021). They measured the writing anxiety of some EFL students in an online class. They found that there is not such a significant discrepancy in the anxiety level of male and female students.

The results, however, are against the study conducted by Siahpoosh et al. (2022), who conducted research to measure the anxiety level of males and females in online speaking classes, and stated that female bilinguals are more anxious than the males in online classes. In another study by Ozturk & Gurbuz (2012) on the same topic, it was revealed that females are more anxious than males while communicating in English.

Considering the third research question, the result of the independent-samples t-test for the comparison of male and female EFL learners' anxiety in face-to-face classrooms showed that there was not any significant difference between the mean scores of these two groups. However, in items 4, 12, 18, and 25, which showed a high degree of anxiety, most of the females revealed their anxiety. Although it was found that there is no significant difference between male and female learners in terms of anxiety, there seems to be a tendency to present higher levels of anxiety by female learners than male learners.

The findings of the current study agree with the findings of Dogan (2020). He found that the foreign language anxiety that the EFL learners have brought with them from the face-to-face learning setting is transferred to distance education environments. The findings of the second research question agree with the one conducted by Sabti et al. (2016). They measured the anxiety level of Iranian EFL learners in high school and found that both genders had high levels of anxiety, approximately at the same level.

The results of the current study are against the finding by Faridian et al. (2014), who conducted a study to measure the anxiety level of Iranian EFL learners in a speaking class, and the results revealed that male students tolerate higher levels of anxiety compared to their female counterparts. Jebiril et al. (2015) investigated the effect of gender and anxiety in a writing class of some Iranian EFL students, and the results showed a significant difference in anxiety among males rather than females.

## Conclusion

With the rapid shift from traditional classroom teaching to various online platforms in education brought by the global pandemic, students were exposed to virtual learning at a higher rate compared to the previous years. This gave way to a more suitable time to assess language anxiety in a face-to-face and online setting among EFL learners in Oman. The study's findings show that Omani EFL learners' experienced average anxiety in both face-to-face and online settings. Learners feel comfortable in both educational settings. Results also indicate that classroom involvement and participation are one of the main features that cause EFL learning anxiety in the online group. However, in the face-to-face group, the teacher plays a vital role as one of the primary sources of students' language anxiety. In terms of gender, results show no significant difference between the male and female EFL learners' anxiety levels both in face-to-face and online groups.

The results of this study can have behavioral and sociological implications for teachers and learners and help them be aware of situations that provoke anxiety to lessen such and decrease its negative effect on learners. There are many ways to lessen learners' foreign language anxiety; suggested strategies were raising awareness of foreign language anxiety and its symptoms, enriching learners' computer-based communication competency, peer support, and learner autonomy. In closing, the results of this research are solely based on questionnaire data without direct observation of teachers and students in the classroom. Hence, it may not be completely generalized. Only two groups were involved; the higher number of respondents might have yielded different findings. Interviewing respondents and direct classroom observation would be significant in finding out learners' source of language anxiety specifically.

## The Authors

*Behnam Behforouz* is an English Lecturer in the English Language Center at University of Technology and Applied Sciences, Shinas, Oman. His current research interests cover TESOL and Language Education. His recent publications include vocabulary learning strategies among Omani EFL learners.

Email address: behnam.behforouz@shct.edu.om

*Marilyn C. Gallema* is an English Lecturer in the English Language Center at University of Technology and Applied Sciences, Shinas, Oman. Her current research interests cover materials development and students' motivation.

Email address: marilyn.gallema@shct.edu.om

*Rhona Maria A. Waga* is an English Lecturer in the English Language Center at University of Technology and Applied Sciences, Shinas, Oman. Her current research interests cover Applied Linguistics.

Email address: rhona.waga@shct.edu.om

*Saif Al Weshahi* is the Head of English Language Center at University of Technology and Applied Sciences, Shinas, Oman. His current research interest covers Applied Linguistics and Education.

Email address: saif.alweshahi@shct.edu.om

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