

**THE EFFECTS OF ANXIETY AND SHYNESS ON  
TERTIARY EFL STUDENTS' ACADEMIC  
ACHIEVEMENT IN BAHRAIN**

**MUSTAFA MOHMMAD ABDELAZIZ SULIMAN**

**UNIVERSITI SAINS MALAYSIA**

**2025**

**THE EFFECTS OF ANXIETY AND SHYNESS ON  
TERTIARY EFL STUDENTS' ACADEMIC  
ACHIEVEMENT IN BAHRAIN**

by

**MUSTAFA MOHMMAD ABDELAZIZ SULIMAN**

**Thesis submitted in fulfilment of the requirements  
for the degree of  
Doctor of Philosophy**

**April 2025**

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

First and foremost, I am incredibly grateful to Allah (SWT) for giving me the strength and knowledge I needed to finish this thesis.

The Prophet (peace be upon him) said: “He who does not thank the people is not thankful to Allah”. To begin with, I owe a debt of gratitude to my main supervisor, Dr. Omer Hassan Ali Mahfoodh, for sharing his wisdom and experience. It would never have been possible to finish this study without his advice, patience, constant encouragement, and moral support. I owe him a great deal for turning this research project into an amazing educational opportunity. No words are enough to compliment you Dr. Omer. You were, and still are, a brother and a friend during this difficult journey. You made this complicated task happen.

My grateful thanks also go to Professor Dr. Tengku Sepora Tengku Mahadi who supervised me until her retirement. Her guidance, perceptive remarks, and substantial input were so helpful for me. A special thanks for my co-supervisor, Dr. Alla Baksh Bin Moh'd Ayub Khan, for his help and support. I would love to thank Dr. Debbita Tan Ai Lin and Dr. Shaidatul Akma Adi Kasuma for their helpful feedback during my proposal defence. Their comments helped me to improve the quality of my research. Special thanks go to my friends who helped and encouraged me during my study.

I owe my late father—may Allah grant him eternal peace—and my mother, my beloved wife and my children for their tolerance, encouragement, and support. I also want to thank my sisters and brothers. I may never be able to express how much I

appreciate their prayers, understanding, support, and encouragement—all of which have been crucial to my success.

My heartfelt thanks and sincere gratitude to all those who made it possible for me to carry out this research. I would especially want to thank all the students who participated in this study, both in the quantitative and qualitative phases for their time and help.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

<b>ACKNOWLEDGEMENT</b> .....	<b>ii</b>
<b>TABLE OF CONTENTS</b> .....	<b>iv</b>
<b>LIST OF TABLES</b> .....	<b>ix</b>
<b>LIST OF FIGURES</b> .....	<b>xii</b>
<b>LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS</b> .....	<b>xiv</b>
<b>LIST OF APPENDICES</b> .....	<b>xv</b>
<b>ABSTRAK</b> .....	<b>xvi</b>
<b>ABSTRACT</b> .....	<b>xviii</b>
<b>CHAPTER 1 INTRODUCTION</b> .....	<b>1</b>
1.1 Chapter Introduction .....	1
1.2 Background to the Study .....	3
1.3 English as a Foreign Language in Bahrain.....	12
1.4 Education in Bahrain .....	15
1.4.1 History of Education in Bahrain .....	15
1.4.2 System of Education in Bahrain.....	17
1.4.3 Higher Education in Bahrain.....	17
1.5 Statement of the Problem .....	21
1.6 Objectives of the Study .....	26
1.7 Research Questions .....	27
1.8 Significance of the Study .....	28
1.9 Scope and Limitations of the Study .....	32
1.10 Definitions of Key Terms.....	33
1.11 Organization of the Thesis .....	36
1.12 Chapter Summary.....	37

<b>CHAPTER 2</b>	<b>LITERATURE REVIEW .....</b>	<b>39</b>
2.1	Chapter Introduction .....	39
2.2	What is Anxiety? .....	39
2.3	Historical Background of Language Anxiety Research .....	41
2.4	Types of Anxiety .....	43
2.5	Sources of Anxiety .....	48
2.6	Signs and Symptoms of Anxiety .....	50
2.7	Effects of Anxiety on Foreign Language Learning .....	51
2.8	Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety (FLCA) .....	53
2.9	Foreign Language Anxiety and Achievement .....	61
2.10	Related Studies on FLCA .....	64
2.10.1	Anxiety in the FL Domain .....	64
2.10.2	Anxiety in the EFL Domain .....	67
2.10.3	Anxiety and Achievement .....	71
2.10.4	Anxiety and Gender .....	73
2.11	Shyness .....	80
2.11.1	Shyness and Its Signs .....	81
2.11.2	Causes of Shyness .....	82
2.11.3	Consequences and Effect of Shyness .....	87
2.11.4	Measurements of Shyness .....	88
2.12	Related Studies on Shyness .....	90
2.13	Shyness and Gender .....	91
2.14	Critical Analysis of Previous Studies .....	94
2.15	Theoretical Framework of the Study .....	96
2.15.1	Krashen's SLA Theory .....	97
2.15.2	Unique Anxiety Approach (Horwitz & Young 1991) .....	99
	2.15.2(a) Communication Apprehension .....	100

2.15.2(b) Test Anxiety (TA).....	101
2.15.2(c) Fear of Negative Evaluation (FNE).....	102
2.15.3 Multi-dimensional View of Shyness (Cheek and Briggs, 1990) .....	103
2.16 Conceptual Framework of the Study.....	107
<b>CHAPTER 3 METHODOLOGY.....</b>	<b>111</b>
3.1 Chapter Introduction .....	111
3.2 Research Design.....	112
3.3 Research Site .....	114
3.4 Research Procedures .....	115
3.5 Answering the Research Questions.....	118
3.6 Research Population .....	120
3.7 Sampling Techniques .....	121
3.7.1 Quantitative Sampling Phase .....	121
3.7.2 Qualitative Sampling Phase .....	123
3.8 Methods of Data Collection .....	125
3.8.1 Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (FLCAS).....	126
3.8.2 Revised Cheek-Buss Shyness Scale (RCBS).....	130
3.8.3 Semi-structured Interviews .....	133
3.8.4 Measurement of Academic Achievement .....	136
3.8.5 Expert Validation of the Instruments .....	136
3.9 Variables of the Study .....	138
3.10 Data Collection Procedures .....	140
3.11 Data Analysis .....	143
3.11.1 Quantitative Data Analysis.....	144
3.11.2 Qualitative Data Analysis.....	146
3.12 Pilot Study .....	151
3.12.1 Sample for the Pilot Study .....	151

3.12.2	Results and Feedback from the Pilot Study .....	152
3.13	Ethical Considerations.....	154
<b>CHAPTER 4</b>	<b>RESULTS.....</b>	<b>156</b>
4.1	Chapter Introduction .....	156
4.2	Demographic Profile of the Sample .....	157
4.2.1	Demographic Profile of Sample in the Quantitative Phase.....	158
4.2.2	Demographic Profile of Sample in the Qualitative Phase.....	160
4.3	Students' Academic Achievement .....	161
4.4	Answers to Research Question One .....	163
4.4.1	Quantitative Answers to Research Question One .....	163
4.4.1(a)	Results Related to Communication Apprehension .....	163
4.4.1(b)	Results Related to Test Anxiety .....	176
4.4.1(c)	Results Related to Fear of Negative Evaluation .....	194
4.4.2	Qualitative Answers to Research Question One .....	204
4.5	Answers to Research Question Two .....	212
4.5.1	Quantitative Answers to Research Question Two.....	212
4.5.1(a)	Results Related to Cognitive Shyness .....	212
4.5.1(b)	Results Related to Behavioural Shyness.....	220
4.5.1(c)	Results Related to Affective Shyness .....	228
4.5.2	Qualitative Answers to Research Question Two.....	234
4.6	Answers to Research Question Three .....	240
4.7	Answers to Research Question Four .....	246
4.8	Answers to Research Question Five.....	250
4.9	Answers to Research Question Six .....	255
4.10	Summary of the Major Findings of the Study .....	258
4.11	Chapter Summary .....	268

<b>CHAPTER 5</b>	<b>DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS .....</b>	<b>269</b>
5.1	Chapter Introduction .....	269
5.2	Discussion of the Answers to Research Question One .....	269
5.2.1	Bahraini EFL Students' Level of Communication Apprehension .....	271
5.2.2	Bahraini EFL Students' Level of Test Anxiety.....	273
5.2.3	Bahraini EFL Students' Level of Fear of Negative Evaluation ...	275
5.2.4	Overall Level of Anxiety among Bahraini EFL Students .....	276
5.3	Discussion of the Answers to Research Question Two.....	282
5.3.1	Bahraini EFL Students' Level of Cognitive Shyness.....	283
5.3.2	Bahraini EFL Students' Level of Behavioural Shyness.....	285
5.3.3	Bahraini EFL Students' Level of Affective Shyness .....	286
5.3.4	Overall Level of Shyness among Bahraini EFL Students.....	288
5.4	Discussion of the Answers to Research Question Three.....	292
5.5	Discussion of the Answers to Research Question Four .....	295
5.6	Discussion of the Answers to Research Question Five.....	298
5.7	Discussion of the Answers to Research Question Six.....	300
5.8	Conclusions of the Study.....	305
5.9	Contributions of the Study .....	310
5.10	Recommendations of the Study.....	312
5.10.1	Practical Recommendations for EFL Teachers .....	313
5.10.2	Recommendations for Bahraini EFL Students.....	316
5.10.3	Practical Recommendations for Policy Makers .....	316
5.11	Suggestions for Future Research.....	318
5.12	Chapter Summary.....	322
	<b>REFERENCES.....</b>	<b>323</b>
	<b>APPENDICES</b>	
	<b>LIST OF PUBLICATIONS</b>	

## LIST OF TABLES

		<b>Page</b>
Table 1.1	Public and Private Universities in Bahrain (Karolak, 2012.).....	18
Table 2.1	Items of communication apprehension .....	101
Table 2.2	Items of test anxiety .....	102
Table 2.3	Items of fear of negative evaluation.....	103
Table 2.4	Items of cognitive component.....	105
Table 2.5	Items of affective component.....	105
Table 2.6	Items of behavioural component.....	106
Table 2.7	Percentage, grades and their corresponding letters (Adapted from scholaro.com).....	109
Table 3.1	Research questions and instruments of the study.....	119
Table 3.2	Phases of thematic analysis (Adapted from Braun and Clarke (2006, p. 87) .....	148
Table 3.3	Themes and codes for coding anxiety interviews .....	149
Table 3.4	Themes and codes for coding shyness interviews .....	149
Table 4.1	Cross-tabulation of age and gender distribution of participants .....	159
Table 4.2	Academic levels distribution of the sample .....	160
Table 4.3	Six interviewees with variations in their anxiety level .....	160
Table 4.4	Six interviewees with variations in their shyness level.....	161
Table 4.5	Distribution of 291 students' grades.....	162
Table 4.6	Frequencies and percentages of the communication apprehension component items in the anxiety questionnaire .....	164
Table 4.7	Means and standard deviation of anxiety level for CA component items .....	172

Table 4.8	Frequencies and percentages of the test anxiety component items in the anxiety questionnaire .....	178
Table 4.9	Means and standard deviation of the test anxiety component items in the anxiety questionnaire .....	190
Table 4.10	Frequencies and percentages of the fear of negative valuation component items in the anxiety questionnaire .....	197
Table 4.11	Means and standard deviation of the fear of negative valuation component items in the anxiety questionnaire .....	203
Table 4.12	Descriptive statistics of the 4 items on cognitive shyness .....	214
Table 4.13	Means and standard deviations of the 4 items on cognitive shyness .....	218
Table 4.14	Descriptive statistics of the 5 items on behavioural shyness .....	221
Table 4.15	Means and standard deviations of the 5 items on behavioural shyness .....	227
Table 4.16	Descriptive statistics of the 4 items on affective shyness .....	229
Table 4.17	Means and standard deviations of the 4 items on affective shyness .....	232
Table 4.18	Assessment of univariate normality and multivariate normality of FLCA .....	242
Table 4.19	Results of multicollinearity analysis .....	243
Table 4.20	Effect of Bahraini FFL students' FLCA on their academic achievement.....	244
Table 4.21	Results of Multicollinearity Analysis .....	248
Table 4.22	Assessment of univariate normality and multivariate normality of RCBS .....	248
Table 4.23	Results of multicollinearity analysis of RCBS .....	248
Table 4.24	The effect of shyness on students' academic achievement.....	249
Table 4.25	Results of testing the statistically significant of the two Pearson correlation coefficients of anxiety and shyness by gender.....	251

Table 4.26	The moderation role of gender on the effects of anxiety and shyness on students' academic achievement.....	252
Table 4.27	Correlation coefficients descriptors (Davis, 1971) .....	256
Table 4.28	Results of Pearson Product Moment Correlation Coefficients between components of anxiety and components of shyness .....	256
Table 5.1	Summary of Bahraini EFL students' level of anxiety per component.....	278
Table 5.2	Summary of Bahraini EFL students' level of shyness per component.....	289
Table 5.3	Correlations between components of shyness and components of foreign language classroom anxiety.....	301
Table 5.4	Correlation between overall anxiety and overall shyness among Bahraini EFL students.....	302

## LIST OF FIGURES

	<b>Page</b>
Figure 2.1	The inverted "U" in the relation between anxiety and performance Source (adopted from MacIntyre, 1995, p. 92).....44
Figure 2.2	Position of the Affective Filter in relation to the learning process (Krashen, 1982, pp. 16-32) .....98
Figure 2.3	Components of the FLCA ..... 103
Figure 2.4	Components of shyness (based on Cheek and Briggs (1990))..... 106
Figure 2.5	Theoretical framework of the study ..... 107
Figure 2.6	Conceptual framework of the study ..... 110
Figure 3.1	Explanatory sequential mixed methods ..... 114
Figure 3.2	Research procedures..... 117
Figure 3.3	Process of data collection..... 143
Figure 4.1	Arrangement of the items of the CA component ..... 175
Figure 4.2	The direct effect of the three domains of anxiety on students' academic achievement .....243
Figure 4.3	The direct effect of the three domains of shyness on students' academic achievement .....249
Figure 4.4	The moderation effect of gender on the relation between affective domain of shyness and students' academic achievement .....253
Figure 4.5	The moderation effect of gender on the relation between language anxiety and students' academic achievement .....254
Figure 4.6	The moderation effect of gender on the relation between shyness and students' academic achievement .....255
Figure 5.1	Means of the three components of foreign language anxiety .....280
Figure 5.2	Means of the components of shyness among Bahraini EFL students .....290

Figure 5.3	Complexity of the effect of FLCA and shyness on EFL students' academic achievement .....	312
------------	------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------	-----

## LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

AAT	Achievement Anxiety Test
AMOS	Analysis of Moment Structures
APA	American Psychological Association
CA	Communication Apprehension
CEFR	The Common European Framework of Reference for Languages
EDA	Exploratory Data Analysis
EFL	English as Foreign Language
ELC	English Language Centre
ESL	English as Second Language
FL	Foreign Language
FLA	Foreign Language Anxiety
FLCA	Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety
FLCAS	Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale
FLL	Foreign Language Learning
FNE	Fear of Negative Evaluation
LA	Language Anxiety
IAS	The Interaction Anxiousness Scale
L2	Second Language
MoE	Ministry of Education
RCBS	The Revised Cheek-Buss Shyness Scale
SLA	Second Language Acquisition
SRS	The Social Reticence Scale
TA	Test Anxiety

## LIST OF APPENDICES

Appendix A	Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Questionnaire (FLCAS) (English)
Appendix B	Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Questionnaire (FLCAS) (Arabic)
Appendix C	The Revised Cheek-Buss Shyness Scale (RCBS) (English)
Appendix D	The Revised Cheek-Buss Shyness Scale (RCBS) (Arabic)
Appendix E	Anxiety Interview Questions (English)
Appendix F	Anxiety Interview Questions (Arabic)
Appendix G	Shyness Interview Questions (English)
Appendix H	Shyness Interview Questions (Arabic)
Appendix I	Validation form for FLC and RCBS
Appendix J	Validation form for the interviews
Appendix K	Academic and professional background of three experts
Appendix L	Interview with Participant One (English)
Appendix M	Interview with Participant One (Arabic)
Appendix N	Interview with Participant Twelve (English)
Appendix O	Interview with Participant Twelve (Arabic)
Appendix P	Letter from USM to facilitate data collection
Appendix Q	Consent form (English version)
Appendix R	Consent form (Arabic version)
Appendix S	Academic achievement of 291 students

# **KESAN KEBIMBANGAN DAN MALU TERHADAP PENCAPAIAN AKADEMIK PELAJAR EFL TERTIARI DI BAHRAIN**

## **ABSTRAK**

Walaupun kebimbangan dan rasa malu dikaji dengan meluas dalam konteks Bahasa Inggeris sebagai Bahasa Asing (EFL), impaknya ke atas pencapaian akademik tidak begitu mendapat perhatian dalam konteks EFL di Bahrain. Kajian sedia ada memberi fokus ke atas kebimbangan EFL dalam konteks yang lebih luas, dan ini membuka jurang dalam memahami bagaimana perasaan malu bersilang dengan kebimbangan dalam mempengaruhi pelajar EFL di Bahrain. Kajian ini merapatkan jurang ini dengan meneroka ke dalam aras-aras kebimbangan kelas bahasa asing (FLCA) dan rasa malu dalam kalangan pelajar EFL tertuari di Bahrain, serta gabungan kesan-kesannya ke atas pencapaian akademik dan peranan penyederhana jantina. Tambahan pula, ia mengkaji perhubungan di antara komponen spesifik kebimbangan dan rasa malu, sekali gus memberi satu pemahaman yang unik tentang pengaruh kedua-duanya dalam senario pelajar-pelajar EFL di Bahrain. Satu rekabentuk kaedah bercampur penerangan berjujuk digunakan, menggabungkan data kuantitatif daripada 291 orang pelajar (yang dikumpul menggunakan Skala Kebimbangan Kelas Bahasa Asing (FLCAS) dan Skala Rasa Malu Cheek-Buss yang telah disemak (RCBS)) dengan data kualitatif diperoleh daripada temubual separa-berstruktur dengan 12 orang pelajar. Analisis- analisis kuantitatif termasuklah statistik deskriptif, ujian-ujian inferensi, analisis korelasi, dan analisis regresi menggunakan SPSS dan AMOS. Analisis tematik telah digunakan untuk menganalisis data kualitatif. Dapatan-dapatan menunjukkan bahawa pelajar-pelajar EFL di Bahrain mempamerkan aras sederhana FLCA dan rasa malu, yang mana kedua-duanya mempengaruhi prestasi akademik

mereka secara signifikan. Jantina didapati tidak menyederhana kesan-kesan ini. Kebimbangan komunikasi dan rasa malu kognitif telah dikenal pasti sebagai peramal-peramal terkuat pencapaian akademik. Korelasi positif di antara komponen FLCA (kebimbangan untuk berkomunikasi, kebimbangan terhadap ujian, dan ketakutan terhadap penilaian negatif) dan dimensi-dimensi RCBS (kognitif, tingkah laku dan afektif) telah diperhatikan, dan korelasinya adalah daripada sederhana kepada ketara. Kajian ini mengutarakan kepentingan menyediakan suasana bilik darjah yang mampu mengurangkan kebimbangan dan rasa malu, membolehkan pelajar mengambil bahagian secara aktif dalam kedua-dua tugas, lisan dan bukan-lisan. Guru-guru perlu membentuk satu suasana yang menyokong dan menekankan aspek kolaborasi, mengurangkan rasa takut pelajar kepada penilaian, dan memenuhi pelbagai keperluan pembelajaran. Tambahan pula, strategi-strategi seperti pembelajaran dengan bantuan rakan, latihan-latihan permainan peranan dan maklum balas peribadi, boleh membantu pelajar-pelajar ini mengatasi rasa bimbang dan malu mereka, dan paling penting meningkatkan lagi pencapaian akademik mereka.

# **THE EFFECTS OF ANXIETY AND SHYNESS ON TERTIARY EFL STUDENTS' ACADEMIC ACHIEVEMENT IN BAHRAIN**

## **ABSTRACT**

Although anxiety and shyness are widely studied in the context of English as a Foreign Language (EFL), their impact on academic achievement has received limited attention in the Bahraini EFL context. Existing research has primarily focused on EFL anxiety in broader contexts, leaving gaps in understanding how shyness intersects with anxiety to influence Bahraini EFL students. This study bridged this gap by exploring the levels of foreign language classroom anxiety (FLCA) and shyness among Bahraini tertiary EFL students, their combined effects on academic achievement, and the moderating role of gender. Additionally, it investigated the relationship between specific components of anxiety and shyness, offering unique insights into their interplay in the Bahraini EFL setting. An explanatory sequential mixed-methods design was employed, combining quantitative data from 291 students (collected using the Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (FLCAS) and the Revised Cheek-Buss Shyness Scale (RCBS)) with qualitative data from semi-structured interviews with 12 students. Quantitative analyses included descriptive statistics, inferential tests, correlation analysis, and regression analyses using SPSS and AMOS. The thematic analysis was applied to analyse the qualitative data. The findings indicate that Bahraini EFL students exhibit moderate levels of FLCA and shyness, both of which significantly influence their academic performance. Gender was not found to moderate these effects. Communication apprehension and cognitive shyness were identified as the strongest predictors of academic achievement. Positive correlations between FLCA components (communication apprehension, test anxiety, and fear of negative

evaluation) and RCBS dimensions (cognitive, behavioural, and affective) were observed, with varying strengths ranging from moderate to substantial. This study highlights the importance of creating classroom environments that reduce anxiety and shyness, enabling students to participate actively in both oral and non-oral tasks. Teachers should foster a supportive atmosphere that emphasizes collaboration, minimizes fear of judgment, and accommodates diverse learning needs. Furthermore, targeted strategies, such as peer-assisted learning, role-playing exercises, and personalized feedback, can help students overcome shyness and anxiety, ultimately enhancing their academic achievement.

# CHAPTER 1

## INTRODUCTION

### 1.1 Chapter Introduction

In today's globalized world, the importance of Second Language (L2) acquisition has significantly increased due to the rapid expansion of the internet, social media, and globalization (He, 2018; Rajitha et al., 2020). As global challenges push individuals and societies toward international competitiveness, EFL (English as A Foreign Language) learners must enhance their language skills to succeed in the global landscape (Gumartifa & Syahri, 2021; Hsu, 2012). The widespread need for effective foreign language learning has raised concerns about the challenges EFL learners encounter. Among these challenges, foreign language anxiety and shyness have been identified as key factors that can hinder language learning and academic achievement (Aida, 1994; Bailey et al., 1999; Bashosh et al., 2013). As education systems adapt to this need, understanding how these psychological barriers have an impact on EFL students' academic performance in language classrooms becomes crucial. This study aims to contribute to the growing body of research by exploring how foreign language anxiety and shyness impact Bahraini EFL students' academic achievement, with a focus on whether gender moderates this relationship.

At a more localized level, this study investigates how anxiety and shyness, as affective factors, influence the learning experiences of Bahraini tertiary EFL students. Despite the broad recognition of the detrimental effects of anxiety and shyness on L2 learners (Teimouri et al., 2019; Silveira, 2020), there is limited research on how these factors specifically affect Bahraini students within the context of EFL classrooms. Through both quantitative and qualitative methods, this study examined the nature and extent of foreign language classroom anxiety (FLCA) and shyness among Bahraini

EFL students, exploring their correlation with academic achievement and their potential gender-based differences. The research also investigated whether gender serves as a moderator in the relationship between anxiety, shyness, and academic performance. By shedding light on these micro-level factors, the study seeks to provide actionable insights and suggestions on how educators can create more supportive learning environments that minimize the negative impact of anxiety and shyness on students' academic success in foreign language learning. This includes fostering an atmosphere that encourages active participation, reduces fear of judgment, and promotes self-confidence among students, ultimately enhancing their language acquisition and academic achievement.

This chapter starts with the provision of background to the study. This is followed by some information on the Kingdom of Bahrain which is the context of this study. The history of education, English as a Foreign Language (EFL), and the system of education in Bahrain are also presented in this chapter. This chapter also includes the statement of the problem, research objectives, and research questions. An explanation of the significance of the study and how it contributes to the existing body of research on shyness and anxiety as well as the limitations of the study are illustrated towards the end of the chapter. Key terms which are used in this research are also defined in this section for readers to understand how these terms are operationalised and conceptualised in this study. The chapter ends with a section on the organisation of the thesis.

While anxiety and shyness are acknowledged as significant impediments to successful language acquisition, their unintended consequences and effects must be examined within the distinct socio-cultural and educational setting of Bahrain. In Bahrain, a country where English occupies a prominent position as a foreign language,

these psychological elements can interact in a distinctive manner with local cultural conventions, classroom interactions, and pedagogical strategies. Investigating these two factors in the context of the Bahraini educational system can offer insights for comprehending how anxiety and shyness affect students' academic performance. The subsequent section contextualizes this research within the Kingdom of Bahrain, providing an overview of the historical evolution of education, the significance of English within the national curriculum, and the particular obstacles encountered by Bahraini EFL learners.

## **1.2 Background to the Study**

Second Language (L2) learning has long been important; however, its significance has grown substantially in recent years due to the rapid spread of the internet, social media, and the increasing globalization of the world (He, 2018; Rajitha et al., 2020). For this reason, global challenges have made it necessary for students to enhance their Foreign Language (FL) skills, particularly in English, to remain competitive on the international stage (Gumartifa & Syahri, 2021; Hsu, 2012). Global challenges such as rapid technological advancements, economic globalization, and the increasing interconnectivity of cultures demand that individuals possess strong communication abilities in a common language. English, as a global lingua franca, plays a crucial role in bridging linguistic and cultural gaps, enabling individuals to collaborate across borders, access a wealth of information, and participate in global markets. As a result, mastering English is not only important for academic success but is also essential for professional opportunities and social integration in an increasingly globalized world.

While L2 learning can be enjoyable, it is often impeded by various obstacles, including factors such as foreign language anxiety, which can prevent learners from reaching desired language proficiency levels (Dewaele & Alfawzan, 2018; Shirvan & Talebzadeh, 2018). These obstacles significantly affect English language acquisition, with anxiety and shyness being two primary factors impacting educational environments (Aida, 1994; B. J. Ali & Anwar, 2021; Alla et al., 2020; Bailey et al., 1999; James et al., 2020; Khan & Al-Mahrooqi, 2015; Malik et al., 2020; Bashosh et al., 2013; Mohammadian, 2013). As a result, these two variables—*anxiety and shyness*—can substantially hinder language learning and academic achievement (Aydin et al., 2020; Bashori et al., 2020).

The process of learning EFL is greatly influenced by a number of psychological and external factors that collectively impact students' success (Wang & Wu, 2025). While commonly acknowledged challenges, like anxiety and shyness, are indeed problematic, other factors including motivation, the teaching method, linguistic barriers, cultural differences, and the availability of resources play a pivotal role in the success of EFL learning (Aydin et al., 2020; Bashori et al., 2020). Such factors are critical for the teacher to understand in order to create a conducive learning environment. However, while these factors are important, this essay focuses on anxiety and shyness because they are particularly salient in the EFL context and often pose significant barriers to communication and language learning.

Motivation is among the most important psychological factors affecting EFL learning. An intrinsically motivated learner driven by personal interest or the sheer joy of learning must be more engaged, persistent, and successful. The absence of motivation, on the other hand, can result in lowered effort and poor performance. Indeed, according to research, internal motivation has a significant impact on EFL

learners' proficiency, stressing the significance of motivation in teaching English (AlOtaibi, 2025; Alrabai, 2016). As a result, methods used to motivate students, such as goal setting, rewards, and personalisation, could substantially enhance the EFL learning process.

Learners' understanding and progress are heavily impacted by teachers' teaching methods. Teachers may fail to meet students' needs when using outdated, uninvolved, or non-interactive teaching methods. Students' engagement and advancement can be encouraged by modern methods such as task-based language learning, which emphasize the practical usage of language and student participation (Skehan, 1998). Teachers may foster greater student participation and confidence by using interactive strategies like group discussions, role plays, and project-based tasks.

Learners in EFL settings frequently encounter language barriers (Ambawani et al., 2025). Students often struggle with unfamiliar vocabulary, complex grammatical structures, and pronunciation difficulties. These difficulties are often aggravated by linguistically and culturally inappropriate tests, which may result in biased assessments of learners' abilities and inaccurate conclusions about their proficiency (Lin, 2015). Instructors must address these challenges with clear explanations, visual aids, and language scaffolding.

Cultural differences between students also have a significant influence on EFL learning. Due to cultural differences, learners may have misunderstandings or discomfort, especially if classroom norms or social expectations deviate from students' typical contexts. According to study, a positive classroom climate that acknowledges and values cultural diversity improves student engagement and motivation the most (Gao & Zhang, 2022). By fostering cultural inclusion and encouraging students to

discuss their backgrounds, teachers can create a more acceptable learning environment.

Another factor that affects EFL achievement is resource availability. Inadequate materials, technological tools, or supplementary language exposure can hinder student success. Incorporating new resources, such as AR systems, has been shown to increase motivation and achievement among EFL students (Zarei & Afshar, 2014). Through digital platforms, language labs, or library materials, ensuring equal access for all learners is key to addressing diverse learning needs.

Teacher-related factors, including their state of mind and preparedness, can have a significant impact on students' academic success. Educator burnout and a lack of training in contemporary teaching approaches can negatively impact classroom instruction. Research has shown that teacher well-being has a direct effect on classroom climate, with positive teacher-student relationships promoting improved student engagement and learning outcomes (Gao & Zhang, 2022). Providing professional development, mentorship programs, and mental health support for teachers is critical to maintaining effective EFL instruction.

Many psychological factors influence EFL learning, but anxiety and shyness are among the most significant. Anxiety, characterized by tension and fear associated with language performance, may limit students' willingness to participate in class discussions, participate in speaking tasks, or express their ideas. Shyness can also cause students to withdraw from social interactions, preventing them from practicing their language skills and gaining confidence. These emotional barriers frequently prevent students from developing language fluency and communicating effectively. According to studies, students who experience anxiety or shyness are more likely to

underachieve, despite possessing the required language knowledge and skills (Aydin et al., 2020).

Although other elements such as motivation, teaching strategies, and cultural differences shape EFL learning, anxiety and shyness present unique challenges that warrant specialized approaches. By focusing specifically on these emotional obstacles, educators may address gaps in the existing research and create methods tailored to reducing anxiety and building student confidence. Relaxation exercises, peer support programs, and positive reinforcement, for example, have all been successful in reducing anxiety and encouraging increased participation in language learning environments.

Hence, EFL learning is a complex process that involves many internal and external variables. While motivation, teaching methods, linguistic barriers, cultural differences, and resource availability influence how students experience EFL learning, anxiety and shyness are particularly significant issues that require concentrated attention. Through a better understanding of these emotional barriers and the introduction of targeted strategies to mitigate them, educators can create more inclusive, supportive, and effective environments for learning English that promote improved language outcomes.

In his Affective Filter Hypothesis, Krashen (1982) proposed that affective variables such as motivation, self-confidence, and low anxiety contribute to successful L2 learning. High anxiety and low self-esteem, on the other hand, negatively affect the Affective Filter, hindering language acquisition. This study examines anxiety as a key variable in this context. The presence of anxiety in L2 learners can complicate the learning process and impede knowledge application (MacIntyre, 2017). Anxiety has long been regarded as one of the most studied affective variables in SLA (Teimouri et

al., 2019; Silveira, 2020). Numerous studies have established a negative correlation between anxiety and academic achievement (e.g., Malik et al., 2020; Phongsa et al., 2018), with some studies revealing significant negative correlations (Abu-Rabia, 2004; Tanielian, 2017; Bouddage & Elfatihi, 2018). However, the influence of anxiety on achievement can vary, as advanced learners may report higher anxiety levels without experiencing an impact on their performance (Marcos-Llinas & Garau, 2009). Notably, the performance of Saudi male students was significantly affected by anxiety (Gawi, 2020).

Shyness is another critical variable. A common trait among people, shyness can have a significant impact on students' classroom performance. Zimbardo et al. (1977) found that 40% of college students considered themselves shy, with this number doubling when asked if they had always been shy. Shy students often face difficulties in social interactions, such as making friends or participating verbally in class, which can further hinder academic performance (Ahmed, 2017). Given that shyness is especially pronounced in speaking classes, educators must address this issue to ensure optimal performance (Gebhard, 2017; Kardas, 2020).

While anxiety and shyness have been extensively studied in second language acquisition (SLA) across various contexts, the Bahraini educational environment presents a unique setting that has not been sufficiently explored in the existing literature. Studies on Foreign Language Anxiety (FLA) and shyness in the Middle Eastern context often focus on countries like Saudi Arabia, Jordan, and Egypt, but Bahrain, with its distinct cultural, social, and educational characteristics, remains underrepresented. Bahraini students are subject to unique gender dynamics in educational settings, where males and females are segregated in primary and secondary schooling, but are integrated in university-level education. This shift in the social

environment may have different implications on students' academic achievement, especially in language learning. Furthermore, while many studies highlight the impact of anxiety on EFL learners, the interaction between shyness and language learning anxiety, particularly in the Bahraini context, has yet to be investigated. Therefore, this study seeks to fill this gap by specifically examining the role of anxiety and shyness among Bahraini EFL students, offering insights that are unique to the cultural and educational context of Bahrain. This research is expected to provide valuable contributions to SLA literature, particularly in relation to underexplored regions in the Middle East.

Gender is also an important factor that may influence both anxiety and shyness in language learning. Although numerous studies have suggested that female students experience higher levels of anxiety than males (Dewaele, 2013; Dordinejad & Ahmadabad, 2014; Gerencheal & Mishra, 2019), other research has found no significant gender differences (Alsowat, 2016; Amengual-Pizarro, 2018), or even the opposite—males reporting higher levels of anxiety (Azher et al., 2010; Campbell & Shaw, 1994). Similarly, findings on gender and shyness have been mixed. Some studies found no significant relationship between gender and shyness (Bashosh et al., 2013; Sadeghi & Soleimani, 2016), while others reported that women tend to report more shyness in interactions with authority figures (Rai, 2011), and still others suggested that male students may be slightly shyer than females (Oflaz, 2019). Given the established impact of anxiety and shyness on EFL learners' language acquisition, this study aims to further explore these two variables and their effects on students' academic achievement.

While gender is a critical variable in understanding anxiety and shyness among language learners, other demographic factors such as age, socioeconomic background,

and educational level also influence these emotional experiences. For instance, older learners may experience heightened anxiety due to perceived expectations, while socioeconomic status can impact access to language resources and support. Additionally, cultural and social contexts, particularly gender roles, shape student engagement with language learning, as societal norms influence their willingness to participate. In many Middle Eastern societies, including Bahrain, gender expectations can affect students' experiences of anxiety and shyness, with distinct differences between male and female students. While other factors contribute to anxiety and shyness, gender-related dynamics in Bahrain make it a key focus of this study. By exploring how gender moderates the effects of anxiety and shyness on academic achievement, this research aims to deepen our understanding of the unique challenges faced by Bahraini EFL students.

Hence, it can be concluded that anxiety and shyness are among the factors that can considerably affect language acquisition of EFL learners, as they influence learners' participation and overall academic performance in foreign language classrooms. These psychological factors can create barriers to effective communication, hinder the development of language skills, and impact students' confidence and motivation to learn. Given their significant role in language acquisition, this study seeks to address anxiety and shyness more effectively by investigating their impact on students' academic achievement. By focusing on these emotional and psychological variables, the study aims to offer practical recommendations for educators and language teachers to create a more supportive and less intimidating learning environment, ultimately enhancing the academic success of EFL students.

While anxiety and shyness are key barriers to effective language learning, the influence of these emotional and psychological factors is shaped by the specific educational and cultural context in which students learn. In Bahrain, where English holds a critical role as a foreign language, the intersection of anxiety, shyness, and the national approach to English language education warrants closer investigation. The following section will explore the status of English as a foreign language in Bahrain, including the historical and educational background of English language instruction, the role of English in both public and private educational institutions, and the impact of socio-cultural factors on language learning. Understanding these contextual aspects is essential for assessing how anxiety and shyness manifest and affect Bahraini EFL students in their academic environment.

Another important variable is shyness. Shyness is a very common phenomenon among people that in a survey of over 800 college students, Zimbardo et al. (1977) found that about 40% of the students described themselves as shy. When they were asked whether they were shy during the past, present or always, the percentage of those who said they were shy doubled (82%). Shyness is a significant psychological factor that affects language acquisition, especially in EFL learning (Sahranavard Kalantar, 2024). A study on Bahraini students found that 82% reported feeling shy at some point, though this does not indicate they are always shy. Shyness, particularly in speaking classes, can hinder participation and language development, often compounded by language anxiety (FLA). This is especially relevant in Bahrain, where English proficiency is important for academic and professional success. While similar issues have been noted in other Middle Eastern countries, Bahrain's unique educational context, including mixed-gender classrooms, warrants further exploration of how shyness and anxiety impact EFL students. This study aims to address this gap,

focusing on gender and cultural influences. It is important to note that there are no studies in the Bahraini EFL context.

### **1.3 English as a Foreign Language in Bahrain**

It has been acknowledged that language is a fundamental characteristic of nationality since the era of nationalism in the early 19th century (Zughoul & Taminian, 1984). As the Arab world gained independence from colonial powers, Arabic came to be used in many sectors including education, economy, and politics. The Arabic-speaking Gulf, Mediterranean, and North African countries experienced a powerful wave of Arabization in the age of postcolonial nationalism (Ponnuchamy, 2017). A higher importance than the sense of belonging was the belief as held by Muslim scholars that the Qur'an can only be understood through command of Arabic. This belief sparked the Arabization movement, which made Arabic the core of curriculum literature of Islamic schools and Gulf universities (Findlow, 2006).

In Bahrain, the government-run schools use Arabic as the primary medium of instruction, but private schools use English as the medium of instruction (Ponnuchamy, 2017). However, both Bahrain's public and private schools offer English at all stages of the educational process (Al Jamal, 1995). Al Jamal (1995) continued that from the [first] grade of the primary school cycle to the university level, pupils at government schools learn English, whereas private schools begin teaching English from kindergarten onwards. Private schools teach different amounts of English than public schools. Some private schools such as Bahrain School and Saint Christopher School teach English exclusively, while in others English is only used in the teaching of some subjects. Albaker (2017) highlighted that Bahrain has 206 government schools and 73 private schools, serving a total of 189,244 students aged 6

to 18. One of the key goals of Bahrain's Economic Vision 2030 is to stimulate and support the private sector, positioning it as a driver of growth, while also empowering Bahrainis to become the preferred employees in the labour market. At the university level, some subjects such as science and engineering, medicine, commerce, industry, and internationalism are taught in English, while other subjects like Islamic and social sciences are taught in Arabic.

Bahrain, similar to other Gulf countries, is experiencing rapid progress, with its economic growth meeting the needs of both its citizens and employers (Iqbal, 2016). Bahrain's population at approximately 1.7 million people. English is widely used as the official language in several sectors of the Kingdom, including business, education, and major organizations (Iqbal, 2016). As global technological advancements have increased the need for communication across different languages and nationalities, English has been selected as the foreign language to be taught in Bahrain's institutions (Iqbal, 2016).

English was introduced as a subject in Bahrain during the British colonial era, when the British introduced a curriculum that included subjects such as mathematics, science, and English. Bulaila and Sdiri (2021) outlined two contrasting perspectives on the role of English in Bahrain. The first perspective regards English as a Second Language (ESL), implying its pervasive presence in various spheres of daily life, including education, business, and government. However, this view often overlooks the deeper sociolinguistic and cultural implications of such a designation, such as its impact on national identity, the development of native Arabic proficiency, and the potential marginalization of traditional linguistic practices. The second perspective treats English as a Foreign Language (FL), comparable to languages like French, Spanish, or Japanese, focusing on its acquisition as a supplementary skill rather than a

core societal component. Despite this classification, English plays a far more dominant role in Bahrain than most foreign languages, serving as a lingua franca among its multicultural population (Gomaa, 2017; Ponnuchamy, 2017). This dominance is driven by the demands of globalization and the economic strategies in Bahrain, where English facilitates communication in diverse sectors, including education and business. Furthermore, Zughoul and Taminian (1984) argued that English is viewed in the Arab world as the language of modernity and career aspirations, while Arabic continues to symbolize religious and traditional values. Understanding these perspectives is critical for contextualizing the sociolinguistic landscape of Bahrain and informing effective language policy and education strategies.

The English language proficiency of Bahraini EFL students varies widely based on factors such as school type, access to resources, and quality of instruction. While many students demonstrate proficiency in reading and writing, challenges persist in speaking and listening due to large class sizes, limited exposure outside the classroom, and varying teaching quality (Al-Baker, 2017; Gomaa, 2017). Students in private schools often outperform those in public schools due to better resources and pedagogical methods (Al-Sayyed, 2019). Addressing these gaps is crucial as Bahrain continues to emphasize English for economic and social advancement. The Ministry of Education (MoE) in Bahrain introduced English as Second Language (ESL) instruction in Bahrain public schools as early as Grade Four (age nine) in 1994 (Charise, 2007). After being introduced in Grade Three in 2000-2001, English was introduced in Grade One in 2003 after criticism of inadequate proficiency levels among ESL learners (Ministry of Education [MoE], 2003).

## **1.4 Education in Bahrain**

### **1.4.1 History of Education in Bahrain**

For centuries, the Quranic school or Kuttab was the only form of education in the Middle East including Bahrain (Abou-El-Kheir & MacLeod, 2017; Al Jamal, 1995). Al Jamal (2005) stated that during this period usually local Mullas (religious men) taught Quranic classes in summertime in their homes, on corner shops, and in bazaar lanes. The institutions were not organized and well established. They were mostly co-educational classes where the main focus was on memorizing Quranic texts and learning to read, write, and do math.

Al Jamal (1995) stated that the modern school system in Bahrain was established in 1919 by establishing the Al-Hidaya Al-Khalifa School for Boys by a group of merchants and prominent citizens. A girl's school was opened despite the opposition of religious leaders in 1928 (Abou-El-Kheir & MacLeod, 2017). Al Jamal (1995) added that it was during the 1940s when the foundations for the entire educational ladder of boys' schools were laid. In 1943, teachers were well qualified to teach subjects, and the entire school system was reformed. By the late 1940s, all schools (primary, technical and secondary) had been improved. Bahrain's first secondary school opened in Manama in 1940 (Abou-El-Kheir & MacLeod, 2017).

The real expansion of education started in the fifties, when primary schools and schools for girls were given special attention. During the 1960s, secondary education experienced a remarkable expansion. According to the Charter of Arabic Cultural Unity, education was instituted according to three levels, namely primary, secondary, and preparatory education. Although Arabic remained the primary medium of instruction, the curriculum placed an emphasis on teaching English language skills (Shirawi, 1987).

An established modern educational system in Bahrain was set up by early 1971, which is the year Bahrain gained independence (Al Jamal, 1995). Bahrain gained independence from the United Kingdom on the 15<sup>th</sup> of August in 1971. The education system in Bahrain consists of: The primary education which lasts for six years, the intermediate and the secondary education and the duration is three years for each stage. Two teacher training colleges were opened in early 1971. These colleges prepared their graduates for teaching in the primary and intermediate schools.

Bahrain has got its independence in 1971. Bahrain's educational history is considered to have developed most rapidly during this period due to the rapid economic and social development. The country has become an educational centre in the Gulf after 23 years following independence (Al Jamal, 1995). Many institutions were established such as the University College of Bahrain and the Gulf Polytechnic (which were merged to form the University of Bahrain in 1986), as well as the College of Health Sciences and Arabian Gulf University, which were founded in 1982. The Bahraini government passed new laws in 1974 and 1975 which made the primary and intermediate stages free and compulsory (Abou-El-Kheir & MacLeod, 2017). There were three sections in the secondary school level: General (arts/sciences), Industrial, and Commercial. All three levels of education taught ESL (Al Jamal, 1995).

Another set of education reform was implemented in the 1980s. There was a two-semester system in secondary school and several streams in the secondary stream, with a focus on technological, vocational, and scientific subjects (Shirawi, 1987). The structure of Bahrain's education was divided into four phases by the end of the 20th Century: Cycle 1, ages six to eight; Cycle 2, ages nine to eleven; Cycle 3, ages 12 to

14, intermediate; and secondary (not named as a cycle), ages 15 to 17 (Alawadhi, 2016).

#### **1.4.2 System of Education in Bahrain**

According to the official website of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MOFA) in the Kingdom of Bahrain, the educational system is divided into nine years of basic education, which includes the elementary and intermediate stages, and three years of high school in its various tracks (Ministry of Foreign Affairs [MOFA], 2021). With a carefully designed plan and programmed projects, the MoE has put great emphasis on developing all educational levels. There are three basic stages in education in Bahrain: The first stage is the Primary stage. In this stage, the school accommodates children ages 6 to 11 years old. There are two cycles, the first of which includes the primary grades of the first three grades in which a class-teacher teaches most subjects, except English language, design and technology, music, and physical education.

The second cycle includes the upper grades. A subject teacher system is applied in which a specialized teacher teaches each subject. The second stage is the intermediate stage. It lasts for three years and accommodates children from 12 to 14 years old. A subject teacher system is also applied in this stage. The last stage for schools is the secondary stage. It prepares the students for higher education or goes directly to the labour market in some tracks. It accommodates students from 15 to 17 years old. It consists of three levels that are divided into six semesters. The education in the public schools in Bahrain is free (bahraineducation.info, 2021).

#### **1.4.3 Higher Education in Bahrain**

The higher education stage comes right after the student completes his/her general secondary stage successfully. There are a number of higher education institutes

in Bahrain such as universities, colleges and institutes. The duration may vary from two years to four years or more. According to Karolak (2012), Bahrain developed tertiary education institutions in two waves. The first wave started in the 1960s and completed by the opening of the University of Bahrain (UoB). During this wave, some institutions were established. For instance, the Teachers College was established in 1966, the College of Arts, Science and Education in 1979, Gulf Technical College (Bahrain Polytechnic) in 1968, the College of Health Sciences in 1976 and the Arabian Gulf University in 1979. In 1986, Bahrain Polytechnic and the College of Arts, Science and Education were merged to form the UoB. In the 2000s, Bahrain experienced a second wave of higher education. According to Karolak (2012), Bahrain was the first Arab country to remove the import or export restrictions on higher education and opened the doors to international markets. As a result, 12 private universities have been established since then (refer to Table 1.1).

Table 1.1 Public and Private Universities in Bahrain (Karolak, 2012.)

<b>Public universities in Bahrain</b>	
<b>University Name</b>	<b>Date of establishment</b>
University of Bahrain	1986
Arabian Gulf University	1979
<b>Private universities in Bahrain</b>	
New York Institute of Technology	2003
AMA International University	2002
Delmon University for Science and Technology	2004
Ahlia University	2001
Applied Science University	2004
Arab Open University	2003
Birla Institute of Technology International Centre	2000
Gulf University	2001
Medical University of Bahrain, Royal College of Surgeons, Ireland	2003
Royal University for Women	2005
The Kingdom University	2001
University College of Bahrain	2001

Due to the requirement that private and international institutions of higher learning meet economic and social needs before gaining accreditation in Bahrain, humanities are largely neglected while applied sciences are highly regarded. These universities also emphasize the need to help graduates to develop English language skills in order to succeed in the job market (Karolak, 2012).

The tertiary education setting is equally significant as it represents the culmination of the education system and serves as a bridge to professional life. Tertiary education in Bahrain plays a vital role in preparing students for the workforce, particularly in a globalized economy where English proficiency is a critical skill. Institutions like the University of Bahrain and Bahrain Polytechnic have adopted English as a medium of instruction for many programs, emphasizing its importance in higher education (Gomaa, 2017; Ponnuchamy, 2017). Including the tertiary education phase provides a more comprehensive view of the educational landscape and contextualizes how English proficiency develops throughout a student's academic journey, particularly in the EFL context. This inclusion aligns with the study's focus on tertiary-level EFL learners and the challenges they face in achieving academic success.

As higher education continues to evolve in Bahrain, it is essential to recognize the challenges faced by students within the tertiary education system, particularly in the Bahraini EFL context. While Bahrain has made significant strides in expanding its educational institutions and improving access to education, the pressures of globalization and the demands of the workforce underscore the importance of achieving high levels of proficiency in English. Consequently, students in higher education must not only master academic content but also navigate emotional and

psychological barriers, such as anxiety and shyness, which can significantly impact their academic performance. Understanding these barriers in the context of Bahraini EFL students is crucial, as it can help in improving Bahraini EFL students' learning outcomes. The following section discusses the problem at hand and outlines the need for further research into the specific challenges faced by Bahraini EFL learners.

The comprehensive examination of the educational framework in Bahrain, with particular emphasis on the tertiary education segment, furnishes critical contextual insights for comprehending the academic trajectories of Bahraini EFL students alongside the impediments they encounter. This research addressed significant deficiencies in the existing body of literature pertaining to language classroom anxiety and shyness experienced by Bahraini tertiary EFL students, thereby aligning with the defined research objectives. In particular, it scrutinizes the incidence of language classroom anxiety and shyness, their respective impacts on academic performance, and the potential moderating influence of gender upon these dynamics. Furthermore, the investigation examined the interrelationship between language classroom anxiety and shyness, thereby providing a comprehensive perspective on how these emotional and psychological obstacles affect educational outcomes. By contextualizing these issues within the distinct cultural and societal frameworks of Bahrain, this study enhances the understanding of the determinants that influence EFL learning and seeks to offer practical recommendations for ameliorating the academic experiences and accomplishments of Bahraini tertiary students.

The shift toward English proficiency is driven by the demands of a globalized economy, where English is often seen as a crucial skill for professional success. This trend is particularly relevant to the current study, which investigates the challenges

faced by Bahraini tertiary EFL students, including language classroom anxiety, shyness, and their effects on academic performance. As higher education institutions such as the University of Bahrain and Bahrain Polytechnic incorporate English into their curricula, it is essential to understand how these emotional barriers, including anxiety and shyness, impact students' language learning outcomes. The educational reforms and growing emphasis on English have shaped the EFL environment in Bahrain, making it a unique setting to explore the interplay between these emotional factors and academic achievement. Therefore, this study's objectives, including examining the relationship between gender, anxiety, and shyness, align directly with Bahrain's evolving higher education landscape, providing insights into how these factors influence the academic success of EFL learners.

### **1.5 Statement of the Problem**

Second Language Acquisition (SLA) plays a crucial role in academic achievement, yet EFL learners often face barriers such as anxiety and shyness that hinder their success (Dewaele & Alfawzan, 2018; GhorbanDordinejad & Nasab, 2013; Sparks & Ganschow, 2007). Krashen's (1982) Affective Filter Hypothesis suggests that factors like motivation and anxiety significantly impact language acquisition, with high anxiety and low motivation acting as barriers. Foreign Language Anxiety (FLA) has been widely recognized as a negative influence on language learning outcomes (Aida, 1994; Horwitz et al., 1986; MacIntyre & Gardner, 1994). Despite these findings, there is a lack of research on the impact of anxiety on the academic achievement of Bahraini EFL students, highlighting a significant gap in the literature.

Shyness is another psychological factor that may adversely affect academic performance, particularly in language learning environments where active

participation is required. Research indicates that shyness is a prevalent trait, with 40% of students self-identifying as shy (Zimbardo et al., 1977). Studies also show a link between shyness and FLA, suggesting that shy students are more likely to experience anxiety in language learning contexts (Chu, 2008). Furthermore, shyness has been found to correlate with lower proficiency levels in EFL learners (Sadeghi & Soleimani, 2016). However, there are no studies examining shyness and anxiety together in the Bahraini EFL context. This represents a major gap that this study aims to address.

While much research has been conducted on anxiety in diverse settings (e.g., Korea, the UK, Saudi Arabia), there is limited investigation into its impact on Bahraini EFL students (Tanielian, 2017; Al-Shboul et al., 2013). In Bahrain, male and female students attend separate schools during primary and secondary education, but they study together at the university level. This unique educational structure may result in different experiences of anxiety and shyness for male and female students. Research from other Middle Eastern countries, such as Saudi Arabia, suggests that gender may influence how these psychological factors manifest and affect academic achievement (Al-Saraj, 2013). However, these findings cannot be directly applied to Bahrain without further research.

While several studies have explored foreign language anxiety (FLA) and its effects, few have examined the combined influence of anxiety and shyness within EFL classrooms. Notably, most research on FLA has been conducted on students from Western and Asian countries (e.g., Horwitz et al., 1986; MacIntyre & Gardner, 1994; Malik et al., 2020). Additionally, some studies have addressed FLA in Arab contexts, such as those by Al-Saraj (2014) and Alsaleem (2020) in Saudi Arabia, and Khan and Al-Mahrooqi (2015) in Oman.

The focus on gender in this study stems from Bahrain's unique educational context, where students transition from gender-segregated schools to co-educational universities, creating a distinctive dynamic that may influence how anxiety and shyness manifest in mixed-gender classrooms. Studies in other Middle Eastern countries, such as Saudi Arabia and Jordan, highlight significant gender differences in the experience of these factors, suggesting that cultural norms and expectations play a role. Age was not included as a variable because the participants did not exhibit significant variations in this regard, allowing the study to concentrate on gender-specific effects. Other demographic variables were beyond the scope of this research.

Given these gaps, this study aims to investigate how anxiety and shyness impact the academic achievement of Bahraini EFL students, with a focus on gender differences. By exploring the combined effects of these psychological factors, the study intends to provide insights into the challenges Bahraini students face, contributing to the development of targeted educational strategies and policies. The following section outlines the research objectives and questions.

The examination of anxiety and shyness together is important because both are psychological factors that significantly impact language learning, and they often interact in ways that can influence academic achievement in complex ways. While both anxiety and shyness have been studied separately in various contexts, their combined effect on academic achievement, particularly in EFL settings, has been insufficiently explored, especially in the Bahraini context.

FLA and shyness share some similar characteristics, such as discomfort in social or public settings and challenges with communication. Both factors can affect students' participation in classroom activities, which is crucial in language acquisition. However, they are distinct in how they manifest. In other words, while anxiety

typically arises from fear of making mistakes or being judged, shyness is a personality trait related to social inhibition. Examining them together is crucial to understand how they jointly influence students' academic success. For instance, a shy student might experience heightened anxiety, particularly in speaking tasks or group work, which could further impair their academic performance. On the other hand, students who are anxious might avoid participation, leading to fewer opportunities to practice the language.

While other psychological factors, such as motivation or self-esteem, are important, anxiety and shyness are particularly relevant in language learning contexts due to their direct impact on communication and classroom interaction. These two factors are especially critical in EFL settings where speaking and interaction are central to learning. In Bahrain, where cultural norms around gender and social interaction can further shape these experiences, it becomes essential to study both anxiety and shyness to fully understand their effects. Gender differences, in particular, may influence how these factors are experienced and expressed, making it even more pertinent to examine them together in this context.

By studying anxiety and shyness together, this research aims to uncover how they interact and affect language learning, providing a more nuanced understanding of the barriers Bahraini EFL students face. This combined approach offers insights that may lead to more targeted educational interventions and support strategies for students in this context. The focus on gender in this study is important because it influences how anxiety and shyness affect academic achievement among Bahraini EFL students. Gender shapes how students interact in class and respond emotionally to learning challenges, with cultural norms affecting male and female students differently. In Bahrain, where male and female students study together at the university level after

attending separate schools, these differences may impact their participation and academic outcomes. Exploring gender in this context will help identify tailored strategies to support both groups and create more inclusive learning environments.

In order to attain a more profound comprehension of the influence of anxiety and shyness on academic performance, this research incorporates the sub-variables of anxiety—specifically communication apprehension, test anxiety, and fear of negative evaluation—as well as the dimensions of shyness: cognitive, behavioural, and affective. These sub-variables facilitate a more intricate examination of the manifestations of anxiety and shyness within the context of language acquisition. For instance, communication apprehension may impede active participation, whereas test anxiety can detrimentally impact academic performance. Previous investigations concerning foreign language anxiety and shyness frequently have emphasized broader constructs without delving into these particular sub-variables, which significantly affect student outcomes. By incorporating these sub-variables, this study addressed a notable gap in the existing literature, thereby providing a more sophisticated understanding of the ways in which anxiety and shyness influence the academic performance of Bahraini EFL students. This methodological approach permits a more thorough investigation of the precise mechanisms through which anxiety and shyness affect language learning, yielding insights that previous studies have failed to consider.

This study primarily focuses on debilitating anxiety within the context of foreign language learning, specifically exploring how anxiety affected Bahraini tertiary EFL students' academic achievement. The research aims to examine the extent to which language classroom anxiety and shyness exist among these students and how these factors influenced their ability to succeed in acquiring a second language. It seeks to understand how debilitating anxiety and shyness hinder students' engagement with