

## **Investigating the Relationship between the Anxiety and Reading Comprehension and its Impact on Preparatory Schools Students' Performance in Misan**

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**Abstract:** This study aims at investigating the relationship between the anxiety and reading comprehension and its impact on preparatory school students' performance in Misan. The study is restricted to fifth grade male and female students in the preparatory school in Misan Governorate, during the second term of the academic year 2012–2013. In this study, 96 female students and 95 male students are included. Sixty students are chosen randomly to represent the main study sample. In order to collect the necessary data. A questionnaire, and a reading comprehension test are applied as instruments. The obtained results indicate the negative relationship between anxiety and reading comprehension. That is whenever decreasing students' anxiety their reading comprehension is increased and the vice versa is correct.

### **التحري عن العلاقة بين القلق وفهم الاستيعاب القرائي واثره على اداء طلاب وطالبات المدارس الثانوية**

**الملخص:** تهدف الدراسة الى التحري عن العلاقة بين القلق وفهم الاستيعاب القرائي واثرها على اداء طلاب وطالبات الخامس الاعدادي خلال الفصل الثاني للعام الدراسي الاكاديمي 2012–2013 في محافظة ميسان. تضمنت الدراسة 96 طالبة و95 طالب، وقد اختير 60 طالب وطالبة بصورة عشوائية لتمثل عينة المجتمع، طبقت استبانة واختبار استيعاب الفهم الاستيعاب القرائي كأدوات للدراسة. اظهرت النتائج وجود علاقة سلبية بين القلق وفهم الاستيعاب القرائي. اي بمعنى كلما قل القلق زاد الفهم القرائي لدى الطلاب وبالعكس.

### ***1.1 Problem of the Study and its Significance***

Anxiety is a complicated problem and could make people's normal performance, especially in a foreign language classroom, particularly stressful (Horwitz, 2001:112). Shamaila (2009:187) attributes reading difficulties to the students' poor language proficiency or inability to decode a text and lack of skills to cope with reading comprehension.

Bailey *et al*, (1999:78) find that students who have low expectations of their foreign language ability tend to have low levels of foreign language achievement, which may reflect an accurate perception of their foreign language. Second language learning does appear to involve relatively high levels of anxiety. Such anxiety may determine perseverance, motivation, and interest in studying a foreign language.

Thus, The students feel anxious when reading whether during comprehension tests or processing tasks. In fact, they feel more nervous in the language class than other classes. The students, who get used to studying short lists of vocabulary items, grammar rules and exercises, usually complain of reading lengthy, complex, abstract and artificial texts. They also claim that the diversity of topics and the embedded foreign culture

themes block their reading comprehension. However, students of EFL classrooms express feelings of nervousness, tension and apprehension when they are asked to communicate in the target language.

Hence, this research is an attempt to find out whether or not the students who lack self-confidence and feel anxiety could not perform efficiently in reading comprehension.

### ***1.2 Aims of the study***

This study aims at:

- 1- Investigating the nature of the correlation coefficient between anxiety and reading comprehension.
- 2- Finding out whether there are significant differences in students' anxiety according to their gender.
- 3- Finding out whether there are significant differences in students' reading comprehension due to their gender.

### ***1.3 Value of the study***

The study can be useful in :

- a- helping the learners to become more independent in studying English as a foreign language and build up confidence in themselves.
- b. serving as a solution for problems related to teachers and learners in RC and

as a contribution in facilitating EFL learning in Misan Governorate ,

c. encouraging students to be good readers through motivating them by developing their abilities in RC skills.

### **1.4 Limits of the study**

This study is limited to fifth-grade female and male students/Literary branch in the preparatory and secondary schools for girls and boys in Misan Governorate for the academic year 2012-2013.

## **1.5 Definitions of Basic Terms**

### **1.5.1 Anxiety**

Horwitz, *et al* (1986: 125) state that “anxiety is the subjective feeling of tension, apprehension, nervousness, and worry associated with an arousal of the autonomic nervous system”

Young (1991: 27) defines foreign language anxiety as “worry and negative emotional reaction aroused when learning or using a second language .

### **1.5.2 Reading Comprehension (RC)**

According to Harris and Hodges (1982: 266) RC is "the linguistic process of reconstructing the intended message of a text by translating its lexical and grammatical information into meaningful units that can be integrated with the reader's knowledge and cognitive structures.”

## **2.1 Theoretical Background**

Anxiety (also called angst or worry) is a psychological and physiological state characterized by somatic, emotional, cognitive, and behavioral components. Anxiety is also associated with feelings of restlessness, fatigue, concentration problems, and muscle tension.

Similarly, Anxiety is still not easy to define in a simple sentence .It is associated with feeling of uneasiness, frustration, self-doubt apprehension, or Worry(Scovel

1978:134).

Likewise , Anxiety can be confused with fear. However, fear is concrete, (a real danger) whereas anxiety is the paranoia of something out there that seems menacing but may not be menacing, and, indeed, may not even be out there.

Additionally , Anxiety is the displeasing feeling of fear and concern. The root meaning of the word anxiety is 'to vex or trouble'; in either presence or absence of psychological stress, anxiety can create feelings of fear, worry, uneasiness, and dread.

## **2.2 Types of Anxiety**

There are three types of anxiety such as :

### **1. Trait Anxiety:**

Scovel ( 1978 : 139) states that a person who is trait anxious is very likely to feel anxious in a variety of situations . He

adds that trait anxious is a fairly stable personality trait .

## **2. State Anxiety :**

Spielberger( 1983:90) mentions that a temporary condition experienced a particular moment as a response to a definite situation.

## **3. Situation –Specific Anxiety:**

A trait that recurs in specific situations (Mc Intyer and Gander,1991: 103 ).

### **2.3 Anxiety Reactions**

Anxiety reactions can be divided as the following :

**a. Emotionality** : trembling ,perspiring ,blushing ,stammering ,fidgeting and general uneasiness.

**b. Worry :**

Tobias( 1995: 135) states that self –deprecating thoughts or task-irrelevant ideas.

### **2.4 Language Learning Anxiety and Its Components :**

Language Learning Anxiety is a situation –specific anxiety , that is a trait that evidences itself in language learning situations , such as classrooms (MacIntyre and Gardner ,1994: 28) .

Also, Horwitz *et al* (1986: 127) define language learning anxiety as " a distinct complex of self –perceptions, beliefs, feelings and behaviours, related to classroom learning arising from the uniqueness of the language learning process".They identify three components

of foreign language classroom anxiety: communication apprehension, , test anxiety , and fear of negative evaluation.

### **1.Communication Apprehension:**

It refers to cases where learners are afraid to engage into real communication with peers or teachers because of poor communication skills, although they possess mature ideas and thoughts . It is the fear of communicating with other people(ibid)

### **2. Test Anxiety :**

Horwitz, and Cope(1986:128) state that a performance anxiety triggered by the fear of failure in tests and involves worry over frequent tests and examinations in language classroom .

### **3. Fear of Negative Evaluation:**

Watson and Friend (1969: 448) state that fear of negative evaluation is" apprehension about others' evaluations, avoidance of evaluative situations, and the expectations that others would evaluate oneself negatively ".It is also the worry

about how others view the speaker. On the other hand, MacIntyre and Gardner (1993:5) see language anxiety as a learned emotional response.

At the earliest stages, the language learner may experience a form of state anxiety, a transient apprehension

experience. After repeated occurrence of state anxiety, the student will come to reliably associate anxiety with performance in the second language.

Also , Oxford(1999:59) calls harmful and helpful anxiety .Teachers may be inclined to view anxiety as a negative factor ,something to be avoided at all costs. But the notion of facilitative anxiety is that some concern some apprehension over

a task to be accomplished is a positive factor (Brown,2000:150-151).

To sum up, Bailey( 1983:50) states that There are generally four components that act together to create and maintain anxiety: The physiological, the cognitive, the behavioural, and the emotional.

## **2.5 Humanistic Approach in Anxiety of the Classroom**

According to Hedge (1982:21), humanistic approach implies that teachers have both the power and the responsibility to counter the development of anxiety by building self-confidence through positive early experiences ,through providing reassuring feedback, and through promoting self-perception of developing proficiency MacIntyre and Gardner (1991:20 ) look in more detail at anxiety in the classroom .The greatest anxiety seems to relate to negative experiences in languages skills. This

would confirm the experience of many teachers ,but the suggestion that arises from such studies

,that anxiety is a response learned through early experiences and that it can increase until the whole process of learning is badly affected ,emphasizes the

need for humanistic approaches in the widest sense of the world .

## **1.5 Anxiety and Reading Comprehension.**

Foreign language anxiety represents a specific situational type of anxiety that is distinct but related aspect to foreign language reading anxiety that is experienced in reading or while the act of reading processing .

Chen( 2007: 7) defines reading in a foreign language as " any discomfort or fear accompanied by reading foreign language texts whether in reading processing or testing" . Reading is also an anxiety-provoking skill. It has a great influence on both readers' reading comprehension performance and on strategy-use awareness.

Furthermore, Phan (2006:43) states that reading is not merely a receptive process of picking up ideas from a page but the third complex skill that involves rapid, purposeful, and comprehending, as well as flexible and gradually developing

interaction. Reading in a foreign language is a complex skill that provokes anxiety( Zhao, 2009: 67).

Moreover , Saito *et al* (1999: 33) consider reading anxiety a distinctive type of foreign language anxiety and a situation- specific type of general anxiety.

To sum up, Foreign language reading anxiety is "worry of readers who read foreign language text under uneasy, nervous situations". Reading comprehension is dependent on the

readers' concentration and effort put in (Chen 2007: 30).

### **3. Methodology**

#### **3.1 Population and Sample**

The sample of this study is 60 students of the English language of the fifth – year secondary stage in Misan governorate. The total number (population) of English of the fifth year secondary stage is about(191) .

The total number of the preparatory school students' population is (191) distributed among girls and boys students in Table (1)

**Table 1 Population and Sample**

<i>Name of the School</i>	<i>Males</i>	<i>Females</i>	<b>Population</b>	<b>Sample</b>
Al- yamama	-	96	96	30
Al-Andulis	95	-		30
Total	95	96	95	60
			191	60

To achieve the aims of the study, the researcher has randomly chosen the Al-yamama and Al-Andulis preparatory school in Misan to

represent the sample of the study.

### **3.2 Instruments**

In order to achieve the aims of the study, a questionnaire and a reading comprehension test have been constructed to be the main instruments used .

#### **3. 2.1 Construction of the Questionnaire**

A questionnaire is one of an inquiring form that includes data gathering information through which respondents

answer questions or respond to statements in writing (Best 1981: 167).

In order to gain information about the level of the students' anxiety , a questionnaire has been constructed drawing on (Saito et al, 1999)

#### **3.2.1.1 Face Validity of the Questionnaire**

Ebel (1972:78) claims that face validity is secured if the items appear to be measuring what is intended to be measured . In order to ensure the face validity of the questionnaire, its first version has been exposed to the experts in the fields of linguistics and methodology of teaching EFL (see Table 2).

**Table 2 *The Academic Ranks, Names, and Locations of the Jury Member***

N	Academic Rank	Name	College
1	Asst. Prof., Ph. D in Linguistics	Saffa. Hussan	College of Education, University of Misan
2	Asst. Prof., M.A. in ELT	Alaa Ismail Chaloob	College of Education University of Anbar
3	Instr., M.A. in ELT	Najim Abdula	College of Education, University of Misan
4	Instr., M.A. in ELT	Saadon Salih	College of Basic Education, University of Misan

5	Asst Instr., MA in ELT	Hyfaa Kahadim	College of Basic Education, University of Misan
6	Asst. Instr., M.A. in Linguistics	Iqbal S. Disher	College of Basic Education, University of Misan

The experts have been requested to judge whether the components of the questionnaire are suitable or not. In the light of the experts' views some items have been added and others have been omitted. However, the final form of the students' questionnaire consists of 20 items. (see Appendix A).

#### **3.2.1.2 Pilot Administration of the Questionnaire**

After ensuring the validity of the questionnaire, a pilot version is administered to a sample of 60 preparatory school students who are taken from the Al- Almara preparatory school for girls (30) and Al- Almara preparatory school for boys (30) .

#### **3.2.1.3 Reliability of the Questionnaire**

Miller(2006:1) states that reliability is defined as the extent to which a questionnaire, observation or any measurement procedure produces the same results on repeated trials.

However, the questionnaire has been read ministered to the same pilot sample after two weeks. The statistical manipulation of the data has been obtained from the two administrations. By using Pearson Correlation Coefficient formula the result yields 0.81 ,whereas ,by using Alpha Cronbach Formula the result yields 0.82 .

#### **3.2.1.4 Scoring Scheme of the Questionnaire**

Accurate scoring procedures should be adopted in order to get proper results to ensure objectivity and reliability (Harrocks & Schannover, 1968:76).

In order to achieve the second aim of the study, the questionnaire is intended to be answered according to a five points scale ( always , often, sometimes, rarely ,or never).The marks are assigned as follows : always 5 , often 4, sometimes 3, rarely 2 ,and never 1 (See Appendix A).

#### **3.4 Scoring Scheme of Test**



Each item is marked as either correct or incorrect. One mark is given for the correct answer of each item and zero for the wrong one. Leaving any item by the testee is also given zero. Since the test consists of three questions which have 5 items for each one, the highest mark for the whole test is 100, i.e. 7 marks for each point.

#### **4. Results, Conclusions, Recommendations,**

##### **4.1 Results**

##### **4.1.1 Results Related to the First Aim**

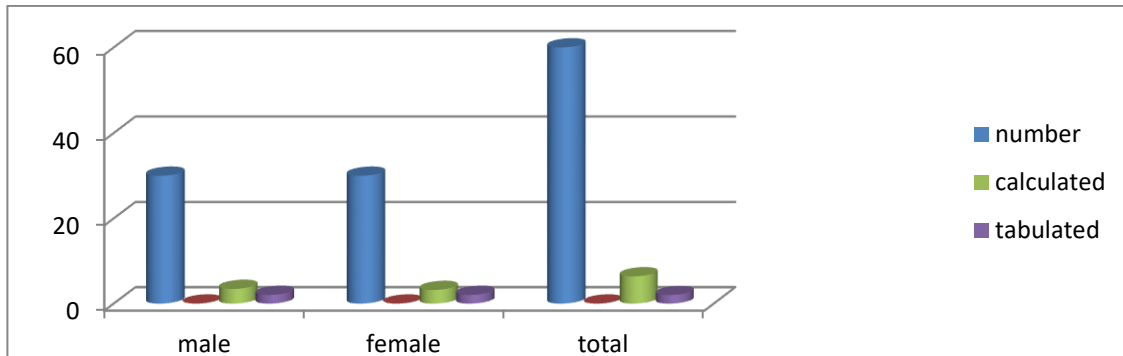
Table (3) indicates that there are statistically negative correlation at

$\alpha \leq 0.05$  between students' anxiety and their performance in reading English. The more test anxiety, the less performance in reading English.

Pearson correlation is used to identify the above aim. The results show that there are reflective relationship between anxiety and reading comprehension, That is, inverse correlation whenever increasing reading comprehension whenever decreasing anxiety to the students of preparatory schools. The results indicate the following as seen in Graphic 1, Table 3.

**Table 3 Results of R-value between Students' Level of Anxiety and their Performance in Reading Comprehension**

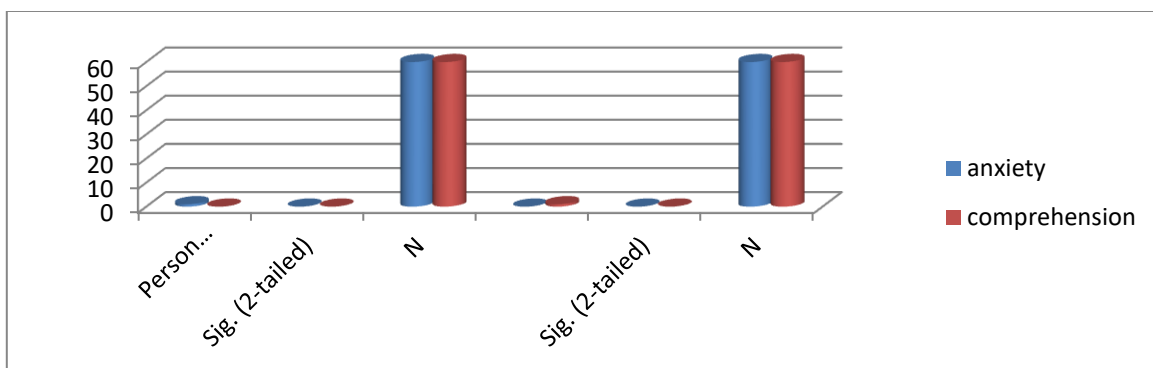
Gender	Number	R-value	T – value		Level of significance  0.05
			Calculated	Tabulated	
Male	30	0,545-	3,439	2,048	Significant
Female	30	0,517-	3,195	2,048	Significant
Total	60	0,643-	6,393	2	Significant



**Graphic(1): Results of R-value between Students' Level of Anxiety and their Performance in Reading Comprehension**

**Table 4 Correlations**

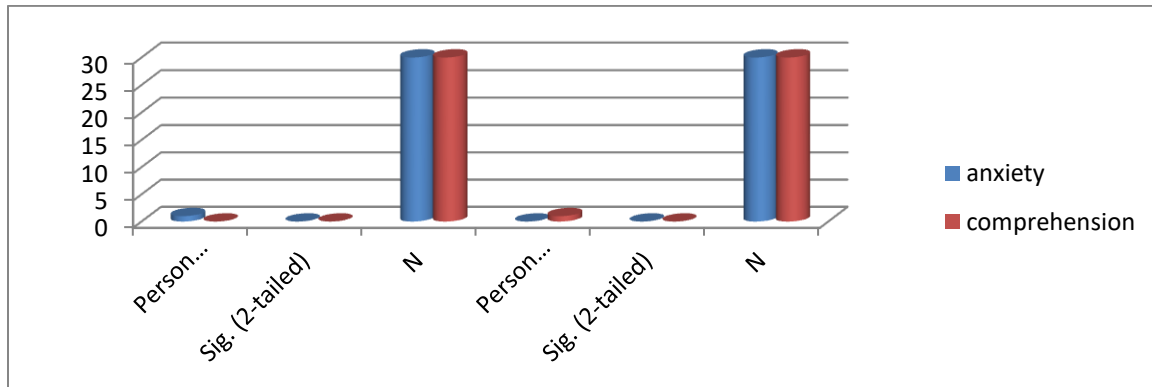
		Anxiety	Comprehension
Anxiety	Person correlation	1	.643-
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.	.000
	N	60	60
Comprehension	Person correlation	.643-	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.
	N	60	60



**Graphic(2): Correlations**

**Table(5 ) : Sex= male / Correlations**

		Anxiety	Comprehension
Anxiety	Person correlation	1	.545-
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.	.000
	N	30	30
Comprehension	Person correlation	.545-	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.
	N	30	30



Graphic(3): Sex= male / Correlations

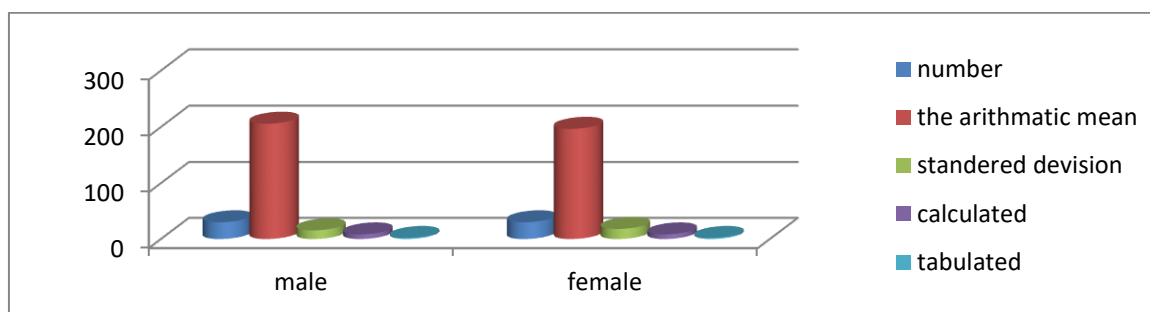
#### 4.1.2 Results Related to the Second Aim

In order to achieve the second aim , 'T- Test' for two independent samples has been used. Table ( 6) shows that there is statistically significant differences at  $\alpha \leq 0.05$  in the anxiety among students according to the gender. The calculated t-value is (8,304), which

is higher than the t-tabulated (2) at (0.05) level of significance and (58 ) degree of freedom. That is, the male students have more anxiety than female students in their achievement in reading comprehension. That is, The differences are in favor of the male students. The results indicate the following as seen in Graphic 4, Table 6

**Table 6 Results of T–Test for the anxiety among students according to gender**

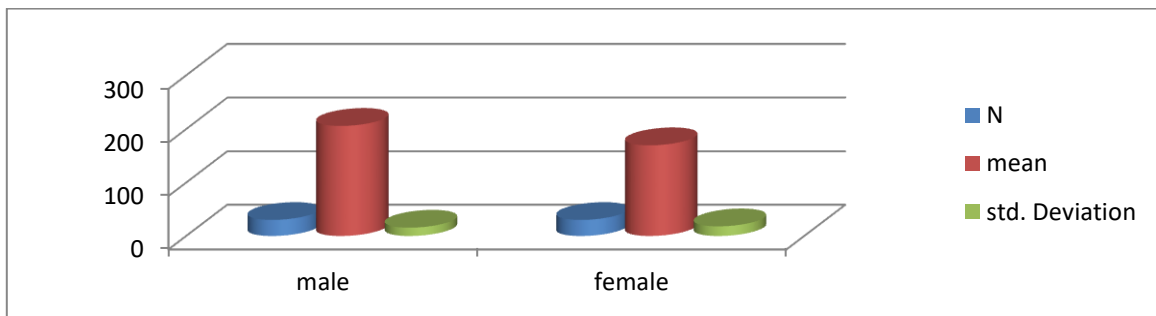
Variable	Sex	number	The arithmetic mean	Standard deviation	T- value		Level of significance  0.05
					calculated	tabulated	
Anxiety	Male	30	205.800	15.51951	8.304	2	Sig .for Male
	Female	30	196.7333	18.03050			



**Graphic (4): Results of T–Test for the anxiety among students according to gender**

**Table 7 Results of T-Test for the anxiety among students according to gender**

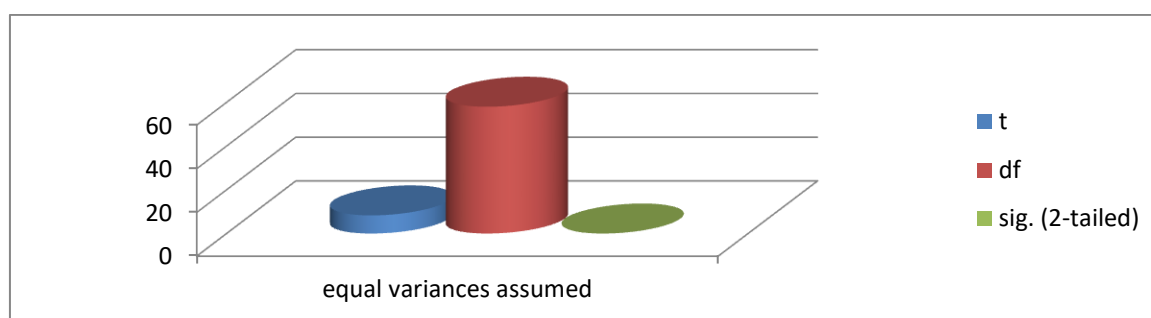
	sex	N	mean	Std. Deviation
Anxiety	Male	30	205.8000	15.51951
	female	30	169.7333	18.03050



**Graphic (5): Results of T-Test for the anxiety among students according to gender**

**Table 8 Results of T–Test for Equality of means**

	t-test for Equality of means		
	T	Df	Sig. (2-tailed)
Equal variances assumed	8.304	58	.000



**Graphic (6): Results of T–Test for Equality of means**

#### **4.1.3 Results Related to the Third Aim**

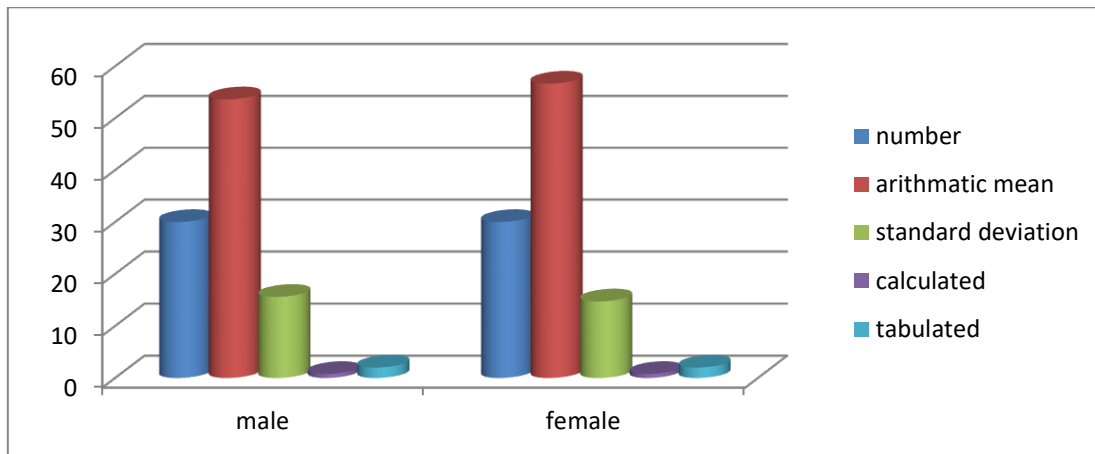
In order to achieve the third aim , 'T- Test' for two independent samples has been used. The results indicate the following as seen in Graphic 7, Table 9

Table (9) shows that there is no statistically significant differences at

$\alpha \leq 0.05$  in the reading comprehension among students according to the gender. That is, The differences are in favor of the female students with middle level of anxiety. The calculated t–value is (0,774), which is lower than the t–tabulated (2) at (0.05) level of significance and (58 ) degree of freedom.

**Table 9 Results of T–Test for the reading comprehension among students according to gender**

Variables	sex	Number	Arithmetic mean	Standard deviation	T-value		Level of significance 0.05
					Calculated	Tabulated	
Reading comprehend	Male	30	53.6333	15.60169	0.774	2	Non-Significant
	female	30	56.6667	14.73053			



**Graphic 7: Results of T–Test for the reading comprehension among students according to gender**



## **4. 2 Conclusion**

Anxiety is considered to be a normal reaction to a stressor. It may help an individual to deal with a demanding situation by prompting them to cope with it. However, when anxiety becomes overwhelming, it may fall under the classification of an anxiety disorder.

In this research male students usually have comfort, self-confidence, and autonomous learning and stress management. Girls are also usually hopeful, serious and patient. They can read slowly but carefully trying hard to find answers and able to do remedial work regularly. The researcher thinks that both genders nearly have the same abilities, low study skills and low interest and motivation toward reading a foreign language. The researcher during the process of checking students' results and correcting papers noticed nearly the same weaknesses and language problems even grammar and vocabulary . They have low self-esteem and low personal expectations. Moreover, they are weak students who make specific typical mistakes. The reason is clear which is that their educational, social environment and economic level are almost the same, and no ethnicity differences are found such as in other cities.

## **4.3 Recommendations**

1-Students shouldn't take anxiety as an excuse to move back. Instead they should compensate for their lack of reading proficiency by reading more and reading regularly. This act of reading must include various topics and contents starting from daily newspapers and ending by novels and big references.

2-Students should increase their repertoire of vocabulary as a tool for reading and this means activating the use of dictionaries to figure out any unknown words.

3-Teachers should realize that no learning takes place without reading and no reading without comprehension.

4-Teachers should train students to read and to apply reading skills instead of depending on random answers and poor reading habits. This training should include specific reading tasks accompanied by applying specific strategies.

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## Appendix (A) Questionnaire on EFL Reading Anxiety

<i>Components and Items</i>		<i>Always</i>	<i>Often</i>	<i>Sometime</i>	<i>Rarely</i>	<i>Never</i>
1	I get upset when I'm not sure whether I understand what I am reading in English					
2	When reading English, I often understand the words but still can't quite understand what the author is saying.					
3	When I'm reading English, I get so confused I can't remember what I'm reading					
4	I feel Scared whenever I see a whole page of English in front of me.					
5	I feel confident when I am reading in English.					
6	I am nervous when I am reading a passage in English when I am not familiar with the topic					
7	I get upset whenever I encounter unknown grammar					

	when reading English.					
8	When reading English, I get nervous and confused when I don't understand every word. while reading English					
9	It bothers me to encounter words I can't pronounce while reading English.					
10	Once you get used to it, reading English is not so difficult.					
11	I enjoy reading English.					
12	The hardest part of learning English is learning to read.					
13	I am worried about all the new symbols I have to learn in order to read English.					
14	I am satisfied with the level of reading ability in English that I have achieved so far.					
15	I would be happy just to learn to speak English rather than having to learn to read as well.					
16	English culture and ideas seem very foreign to me.					
17	You have to know so much about English history and culture in order to read English.					

18	I don't mind reading to myself, but I feel very uncomfortable when I have to read English aloud.					
19	By the time you get past the funny letters and symbols in English, it's hard to remember what you're reading about					
20	I have to know so much about English history and culture in order to read English					

## **Appendix (B)            THE TEST**

***Read the following passage carefully, and answer the questions below:***

Henry likes fishing. He fishes in the river near his house. In the evening he makes flies out of little pieces of wool and ties them to his hooks. Then on every Saturday afternoon, when he has work, he goes down to the river with a little seat and some sandwiches and fishes until it is quite dark. There are always a few other people there. They love fishing too, and they all sit there quietly for hours. Sometimes they catch some fish, sometimes they do not.

Once Henry caught a big fish. He was very happy. All the other fishermen left their places and came to see his fish. One of them had a camera, so he took a photograph of Henry and his big fish.

Another time Henry fell into the river! The grass was slippery because there was some mud on it, and while he was pulling his line, he slipped and fell into the dirty water. Henry does not swim, but the two nearest pulled him out quickly, and he ran home, with mud all over his face!

### **Q1/Answer these questions:**

- 1-What does Henry usually take with him when he goes to the river?
- 2-Was Henry able to catch any fish?
- 3- Who saved Henry's life?
- 4-Give a suitable title to this passage?
- 5- What is the main idea of the passage in short?

### **Q2/Put one word from this passage in each empty place in these sentences:**

- 1-Henry ties ..... to his hooks.
- 2-He sits on a ..... when he is fishing.
- 3- ..... took a photograph of Henry and his big fish.
- 4-When Henry fell into the river, he became .....

5-When he got home; there was mud on his .....

**Q3/Select the right choice that best completes the sentence, according to the passage:**

1-Henry was ..... when he caught a big fish.

a-sad   b-happy   c-tired   d-hungry

2-One of the hobbies that he is interested in is .....

a-swimming   b-photographing   c-fishing   d-running

3-Henry usually takes.....with him when he goes to the river.

a-a camera   b-a boat   c-a sandwich   d-a seat and sandwiches

4-Henry fell into the river but he doesn't know how to.....

a-swim   b-pull   c-fish   d-run

5-Henry goes fishing every ...   a-day   b-week   d-month   c-year