

The Effect of Shyness on Academic Achievement among Bahraini EFL Students: The Moderating Role of Gender

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Abstract

Learning a second language (L2) presents various challenges, with shyness being a significant barrier for EFL students. This study investigated the impact of shyness on the academic achievement of 291 Bahraini EFL students and examines how gender may moderate this relationship. Using a quantitative approach, the research involved administering Revised Cheek and Buss Shyness Scale and analysing students' academic scores. Data were processed through descriptive statistics, inferential statistics, and regression analysis. Results revealed moderate shyness levels among participants, with cognitive shyness—marked by fears of negative evaluation and conversational mistakes—negatively affecting academic performance. In contrast, behavioural and affective shyness did not significantly influence academic success. Cognitive shyness resulted in reduced class participation and social isolation, which contributed to lower academic achievement. The study also found that gender did not significantly moderate the effects of shyness on students' achievement, suggesting that cultural norms and equal social support levels for both genders might mitigate gender differences. These findings highlight the importance of addressing shyness, especially cognitive shyness, to enhance EFL students' academic outcomes and suggest the need for tailored interventions to support learners with social anxieties.

Keywords: Effect, Shyness, Academic Achievement, Bahraini EFL Students, Moderating Role

Introduction

Second Language (L2) learning has recently become increasingly vital due to the rapid proliferation of the internet, social media, and globalization (He, 2018). However, challenges such as anxiety, shyness, and gender-related issues may impede learners from achieving the desired proficiency level (Dewaele & Alfawzan, 2018; Shirvan & Talebzadeh, 2018). Shyness, in particular, is a notable barrier (Bashosh et al., 2013; Mohammadian, 2013; Aydin et al., 2020; Bashori et al., 2020) and a common psychological issue that may influence performance (Ahmed, 2017). This makes shyness a significant concern in L2 learning for shy students;

hence, addressing the impact of shyness is essential to ensure optimal classroom performance (Gebhard, 2017; Kardas, 2020). Gender may also be an important variable and may be connected to shyness. For example, Rai (2011), reported that women experienced greater shyness in interactions with unfamiliar people. However, Bashosh et al. (2013), and Sadeghi and Soleimani (2016), did not find a significant relationship between shyness and gender. Later, Oflaz (2019), found that male students were slightly shy than female students.

Various studies have examined shyness as a personality trait (Chu, 2008), given its prevalence among individuals. While research has been conducted in some Arab countries, the context varies significantly from one country to another. For instance, Al-Saraj (2013), noted that in the Saudi EFL context and many neighbouring Arab countries, men and women attend separate schools due to tradition and rules in educational settings. Al-Saraj (2013) further highlighted that women are not permitted to enrol in male colleges in the Saudi context. In contrast, Bahrain presents a different scenario: male and female students attend separate schools during their elementary, intermediate, and secondary education in government schools but share classrooms at the university level. Consequently, the impact of shyness on both genders might differ. Therefore, investigating shyness in the Bahraini EFL context deserve researchers' attention and could yield distinct findings compared to the findings reported in other Arab EFL countries. Furthermore, most research in the Arab region has focused on anxiety and other factors, leaving shyness relatively underexplored. To the best of the researchers' knowledge, shyness has not been investigated in the Bahraini EFL context. Hence, this study aims to fill an existing gap by examining the extent and effects of shyness on Bahraini EFL learners' achievement. Specifically, the current study addressed the following three research questions:

1. To examine the extent to which Bahraini EFL students experience shyness in the classroom.
2. To identify the effect of shyness on the academic achievement of Bahraini EFL students.
3. To explore whether Bahraini EFL students' gender statistically and significantly moderate the effects of shyness on their academic achievement?

This study highlights the significant prevalence of shyness among Bahraini EFL students and its impact on language learning. Understanding and addressing shyness can help students develop strategies to overcome this obstacle, improving their language acquisition. The findings offer valuable insights for teachers and policymakers to recognize shyness, enhance teaching practices, and create supportive learning environments. By focusing on shyness's effects on academic achievement, the research aims to fill gaps in the literature and inform future educational practices, ultimately contributing to better learning outcomes.

Literature Review

Conceptualization of Shyness

Shyness is a personality trait that is widely spread among students all over the world, but it may differ from one country to another and from a culture and another even in the same country. Shyness is defined by Tang and Schmidt (2017) as "social withdrawal-related tendencies in social situations reflected by active avoidance and an anxious preoccupation with the self in response to real or imagined social interactions" (p. 1). Yet, there remains controversies in the psychology of personality regarding how shyness should be

conceptualized (Crozier, 2005). Crozier attributes this controversy to two main factors: the lack of a singular definition for the term, which can encompass a broad range of meanings, and the analysis of shyness through three primary components: cognitive (acute self-consciousness, biased appraisals, and self-attributions for social difficulties), affective (subjective anxiety and somatic reactions), and behavioural (inhibited and reticent behaviours) (Crozier, 2005).

Despite the fact that shyness is very common among people, its effect may “vary from occasional feelings of awkwardness in the presence of others all the way to traumatic episodes of anxiety that totally disrupt a person’s life” Zimbardo (1977, p.16), or it may “become a severe form of neurosis” Zimbardo (1977, p.19). Zimbardo et al. (1977) found that about 40% of the over 800 students described themselves as presently shy. For this reason, the researchers realize that the problem of shyness is really huge, and it has a big effect on the students’ performance. It may even hinder the learning process of students. Even though “shyness has been widely researched and discussed in the literature” Chu (2008, p. 12), there are only few studies that looked into the effects of shyness on the learning process, especially in EFL contexts.

Related Studies

Research into shyness and its effects on various aspects of life has been extensive, with studies examining its impact on social interactions, internet use, and language learning (Miller, 1995). Zimbardo et al. (1977), found that men were shyer than women in their study of over 800 students from Stanford, Berkeley, and Palo Alto High School using the Stanford Shyness Survey. Coplan et al. (2004), investigated shyness in 77 children attending public kindergarten classes in Ontario, Canada. Their findings indicated no significant gender differences in shyness scores, reinforcing the notion that shyness is not strongly influenced by gender.

At a large British university, Crozier (2005), analysed data from 741 students and found no significant gender differences in shyness scores, suggesting that shyness is equally prevalent among males and females. Chu (2008), compared strategies, classroom anxiety, motivation, and willingness to communicate between shy and non-shy students among 364 first and second-year students at a private university in Taiwan. Chu found a positive and moderate correlation between shyness and foreign language anxiety, indicating that shyer students experienced higher levels of anxiety in language learning contexts.

In the Iranian EFL context, some studies have focused on shyness and reported some important findings. For example, Vahedi (2011), reported no significant differences in shyness between genders among 300 undergraduate students. Mohammadian (2013), examined the effects of shyness on 60 Iranian EFL learners' motivation and willingness to communicate, reporting a positive correlation between shyness and language learning motivation. Non-shy students exhibited higher intrinsic motivation compared to their shy peers. In the same year, Bashosh et al. (2013), studied the relationship between shyness, foreign language classroom anxiety (FLCA), willingness to communicate, gender, and EFL proficiency among 60 Iranian undergraduate students, finding no significant relationships between these variables.

Recently, Oflaz (2019), investigated shyness among 110 German preparatory class students at Ondokuz Mayıs University in Turkey. The study revealed that although male students' shyness scores were slightly higher than those of female students, the difference was not statistically significant. This finding aligns with several other studies indicating that shyness does not vary significantly by gender, suggesting that both male and female students experience similar levels of shyness regardless of gender differences. This contributes to the growing body of literature that challenges traditional gender stereotypes related to emotional and social behaviours, emphasizing the importance of considering individual differences over generalized gender-based assumptions.

In conclusion, while extensive research has explored the relationship between shyness and various factors such as gender, internet use, and EFL learning across different cultural contexts, there is a notable gap in the literature concerning the impact of shyness on EFL students within Arab contexts. Existing studies predominantly focus on Western or East Asian settings, leaving a significant need for research in Arab EFL environments. Understanding the dynamics of shyness in these contexts is crucial, as cultural and educational factors uniquely influence students' language learning experiences and outcomes. Moreover, while studies like Bashosh et al. (2013), suggest that shyness does not necessarily impact EFL learners' performance, the research on this topic is limited. In many Arab countries, where coeducation is less common, gender-specific studies have been conducted separately on male and female students, further complicating the understanding of shyness's overall impact. Research on the effect of shyness on EFL learners' achievement is scarce, especially within Arab contexts. To the best of the researcher's knowledge, no studies have comprehensively examined shyness among Arab EFL learners.

Hence, this study aims to fill this gap by investigating the effects of shyness on Bahraini EFL learners and providing insights that can benefit Arab EFL learners more broadly. The study also seeks to raise awareness among teachers and students about addressing shyness, which can significantly affect the learning process.

Theoretical Background

This study is informed by the dimensional approach to shyness. According to Cheek and Briggs (1990), shyness can be conceptualized through three dimensions. They challenge the view of shyness as a unidimensional construct, arguing instead that it consists of multiple components. For instance, Schlenker and Leary (1982), and Jones and Russell (1982), viewed shyness as a distinct and separate personality dimension. Cheek and Buss (1981), proposed that shyness encompasses both behavioural experiences in social interactions and the willingness to be with others, suggesting it is more complex than mere low sociability. Two years later, Leary (1983), offered an alternative perspective by distinguishing between cognitive and affective elements of shyness, excluding behavioural manifestations. However, Cheek and Briggs (1990), criticized Leary's narrower conceptualization of shyness, advocating for a broader, multidimensional view that includes cognitive, affective, and behavioural components. They asserted that shyness is a three-component syndrome where individuals may experience one, two, or all three dimensions. The cognitive component involves acute self-consciousness, biased situation assessments, irrational beliefs, and self-attributions of social difficulties. The behavioural component is characterized by inhibition in social behaviours, such as avoiding eye contact and non-verbal communication, and general social

avoidance. The affective component includes anxiety, muscle tension, rapid heartbeat, stomach upset, and other psychophysiological responses.

Method

Research Approach and Context

The study employed a quantitative approach due to its numerous advantages. This method facilitated the collection of data from a large sample, enhancing the generalizability of the results. Quantitative research, rooted in positivism and now often adopting a post-positivistic stance, typically involves numbers, quantification, and statistics to address research questions and usually requires a large sample size (Creswell, 2012; Leedy et al., 2021). The post-positivism research paradigm was chosen for its ability to provide measurable and statistically analysable data, crucial for examining relationships between variables in a structured manner, thereby allowing for understanding of research findings while maintaining rigorous standards of quantitative analysis.

The research site for the current study was the English programme classes at a university in Bahrain. This programme is designed for students who score less than 90% on their secondary school certificate and do not pass the exemption exam from the university's foundation programme. The students are homogeneous in their educational background, with most coming from government schools in Bahrain. All students must have completed secondary school to be admitted to the university. They also share similar experiences with English, as well as age, nationality, and their mother tongue, which is Arabic.

Participants

The respondents were selected using systematic sampling, a specific probability sampling technique (Leedy et al., 2021). The population consisted of clusters (sections) with similar characteristics, and a systematic sample is drawn from a list, selecting every *n*th individual or cluster until the desired sample size is achieved (Creswell, 2012; Fraenkel et al., 2011). This method is convenient because students did not need to be numbered individually; instead, they were chosen in clusters (Leedy et al., 2021). A total of 291 students from different English courses were selected, and this number was determined based on prior studies, with Bartlett et al. (2001) suggesting that 10% of a research population is sufficient to address research questions. Additionally, all participants had to have graduated from high school and passed their General Secondary Certificate, the final schooling year in Bahrain before university enrolment.

Data Collection

Data were collected using the Revised Cheek-Buss Shyness Scale (RCBS), developed by Cheek (1983) based on Cheek and Buss's (1981) original 9-item shyness and sociability scale. The RCBS measures shyness through 13 items on a 5-point Likert scale, ranging from very uncharacteristic, untrue, or strongly disagree (1) to very characteristic, true, or strongly agree (5). The scale includes 4 items representing the cognitive component (items 2, 5, 9, and 11), 4 items for the affective component (items 1, 4, 8, and 13), and 5 items for the behavioural component (items 3, 6, 7, 10, and 12). This distribution was established based on the opinions of a senior psychiatrist and other psychologists and psychiatrists. Four of the items (3, 6, 9, and 12) are inverted due to their negative wording, requiring the following adjustments: (1=5), (2=4), (4=2), and (5=1).

To measure students' achievement, the average score of the final grades was used as an indicator of academic achievement. The grades were assigned based on percentage scores, which were then converted into letter grades at the end of the semester. This method allowed for a standardized assessment of students' progress. By averaging the final grades of these courses, the evaluation provided a balanced measure of overall academic achievement. This holistic approach ensured that the assessment captured a wide range of competencies, providing a clear picture of each student's academic achievement.

Data Analysis

To analyse the data, the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences Software (SPSS Version 26, IBM 2016) and Analysis of Moment Structures (AMOS) were used. Descriptive statistics was employed in this study to find the mean (measures of central tendency), frequencies, percentages, and standard deviations (measures of dispersion). Descriptive statistics helped the researchers explain survey respondents' answers to questionnaire items and to determine patterns and trends in the data. For this study, descriptive statistics included the calculation of frequencies and the means of all items in order to report the demographic information of the participants. The ranges of agreement with the attributions/components on the shyness scale were determined using the following rank: the interval of 1 to less than 2.33 showed low level, the interval of 2.33 to less than 3.66 showed moderate level, and the interval of 3.66 to 5 showed a high level of agreement with the statement (item) on the scale, as cited in Birisci et al. (2009). Furthermore, reports included the distributions of the sample across the included constructs of the questionnaire.

To examine the effect of shyness on Bahraini EFL achievement, path analysis in AMOS was used. To analyse the moderating effect of gender, the analysis began by calculating Pearson correlation coefficients for shyness based on gender. This step helped the researchers understand the relationship between each of these variables and academic achievement for male and female Bahraini EFL students. Next, the study compared these correlation coefficients to determine if there is a significant difference between the correlations for males and females

Before data analysis, the statistical assumptions for the study were carried out. They included thorough data screening to check for missing data, outliers, and errors, with none found, ensuring the dataset's completeness and accuracy. Univariate normality was confirmed as no kurtosis values exceeded 3.0. Multivariate normality was validated using Mardia's test, with results indicating normal distribution, and bootstrapping was employed for further validation. Multicollinearity checks showed acceptable correlation coefficients (ranging from .412 to .745), tolerance values (.547 to .650), and VIF values (1.538 to 1.828), all below the threshold of 5.0, confirming no multicollinearity issues. These validations ensured the dataset was suitable for reliable statistical analysis.

Results

Answers to Research Question 1

Table 1 presents the results of the level of shyness among the 291 Bahraini EFL students. As shown in the table, the highest mean score was observed for Item CS 5, with a mean of 2.77 and a standard deviation of 1.71. This item measures students' difficulty in generating conversation topics in group settings. The mean score suggests that Bahraini EFL students

commonly experience challenges in engaging in group conversations, likely due to perceived pressure to contribute meaningfully. Item CS 2 has a mean and standard deviation of 2.50 and 1.21, respectively, indicating that Bahraini EFL students generally feel socially awkward, reflecting a common experience of discomfort or uncertainty in social interactions among the surveyed students.

For Item CS 9 ("I have no doubts about my social competence"), the mean is 2.46 with a standard deviation of 1.61, suggesting a moderate level of agreement among Bahraini EFL students regarding their social competence. The standard deviation reveals variations in responses, indicating that while some students are confident in their social abilities, others are more uncertain. Item CS 11 ("I feel inhibited in social situations") shows a mean of 2.31 and a standard deviation of 1.06, indicating a low level of agreement. This suggests that while some students might feel inhibited in social settings, it is not a pervasive issue among others.

While the mean and standard deviation provide valuable insights, they do not capture the full complexity of social competence. In summary, the results related to the means and standard deviations of the four items assessing Bahraini EFL students' cognitive shyness highlight their self-perceptions and challenges in social interactions. By understanding these differences, researchers and language teachers in the Bahraini EFL context can develop targeted interventions to enhance social skills and promote positive social outcomes. The results indicate that Bahraini EFL students exhibit moderate levels of cognitive shyness in three aspects, as detailed in the table. However, their cognitive shyness is low in terms of feeling inhibited in social settings.

Concerning behavioural shyness, Item BS 7 has the highest mean among the items, as shown in the table. The responses indicate that Bahraini EFL students, on average, slightly agree with the statement ($M = 2.69$, $SD = 1.23$), suggesting that many students find it challenging to act naturally when meeting new people. This difficulty may stem from cultural differences or a lack of familiarity with social norms in new settings, especially when learning English. Item BS 12 also shows that Bahraini EFL students, on average, slightly agree with the statement ($M = 2.59$, $SD = 1.33$). This demonstrates that while many Bahraini EFL students do not find it overly challenging to talk to strangers, a significant number still struggle. This finding suggests that students may benefit from activities that help them develop conversational skills and build confidence in interacting with strangers.

The mean and standard deviation for Item BS 3 are 2.54 and 1.18, respectively. Examination of these scores shows that Bahraini EFL students exhibit a moderate level of agreement with this statement. This indicates that while many students do not find it overly challenging to ask others for information, some still experience notable difficulty. This finding may reflect varying levels of confidence and assertiveness among students in seeking information from others.

Table 1

Descriptive Statistics of Shyness Level among Bahraini EFL Students

Dimension	No.	Items	Mean	Std Dev.	Level
Cognitive shyness	CS 5	When in a group of people, I have trouble thinking of the right things to talk about.	2.77	1.71	Medium
	CS 2	I am socially somewhat awkward.	2.50	1.21	Medium
	CS 9	I have no doubts about my social competence.	2.46	1.61	Medium
	CS 11	I feel inhibited in social situations.	2.31	1.06	low
Behavioural shyness	BS 7	It is hard for me to act natural when I am meeting new people.	2.69	1.23	Medium
	BS 12	I do not find it hard to talk to strangers.	2.59	1.33	Medium
	BS 3	I do not find it difficult to ask other people for information.	2.54	1.18	Medium
	BS 6	It does not take me long to overcome my shyness in new situations.	2.51	1.27	Medium
	BS 10	I have trouble looking someone right in the eye.	2.45	1.20	Medium
Affective shyness	AS 13	I am more shy with members of the opposite sex.	3.07	1.38	Medium
	AS 4	I am often uncomfortable at parties and other social functions.	2.91	1.26	Medium
	AS 1	I feel tense when I'm with people I don't know well.	2.79	1.25	Medium
	AS 8	I feel nervous when speaking to someone in authority.	2.57	1.22	Medium

In summary, the analysis of behavioural shyness among Bahraini EFL students reveals a range of challenges and varying levels of confidence in social interactions. Item BS 7 indicates that students generally struggle to act naturally when meeting new people, potentially due to cultural differences and unfamiliarity with social norms. Item BS 12 shows that while some students are comfortable talking to strangers, others still find it difficult, highlighting the need for targeted conversational skills development. Similarly, Item BS 3 demonstrates that confidence in asking others for information varies among students, with some experiencing notable difficulties. Overall, these findings emphasize the importance of tailored interventions to enhance social skills and reduce behavioural shyness, ultimately promoting more positive social outcomes for Bahraini EFL students.

Responses to items on affective shyness are reported in Table 1. Responses to Item AS 13 show that Bahraini EFL students moderately agreed with the statement indicating a tendency towards shyness with individuals of the opposite sex ($M = 3.07$, $SD = 1.38$). This suggests a noticeable but not overwhelming level of discomfort or hesitation in social interactions specifically with members of the opposite sex. The standard deviation indicates that while this tendency is common, there is variability among individuals, with some feeling significantly

shyer than others in these situations. In Item AS 4, Bahraini EFL students reported a moderate feeling of discomfort at social gatherings, such as parties, with a mean of 2.91 and a standard deviation of 1.26. This indicates the presence of a common but not extreme discomfort in social settings. The standard deviation suggests that while many students feel somewhat uncomfortable, there are also those who feel more at ease, leading to variability in responses.

Responses to Item AS 1 show that Bahraini EFL students exhibit a moderate level of tension when in the company of unfamiliar individuals ($M = 2.79$, $SD = 1.25$). This reflects a tendency towards feeling tense or uneasy in such situations. However, this feeling is not overwhelmingly common for all students. The standard deviation indicates that while many individuals experience this tension, some students feel more relaxed or at ease in the company of strangers, especially when communicating in English.

Item AS 8 shows a moderate level of nervousness among Bahraini EFL students when communicating with authority figures ($M = 2.57$, $SD = 1.22$). This indicates that while some students feel nervous in these situations, it is not a universal experience. The standard deviation suggests variability in how students feel when speaking to authority figures, with some feeling much more nervous than others. These results suggest that, on average, Bahraini EFL students tend to agree slightly more with the statement "I am more shy with members of the opposite sex" compared to the other statements. The highest variability is seen in the responses regarding shyness with members of the opposite sex.

In conclusion, results reported in Table 1 show that Bahraini EFL students experience moderate levels of affective shyness in various aspects, including shyness in the presence of unfamiliar people, at social events, when interacting with authority figures, and with members of the opposite sex. These aspects collectively contribute to the affective shyness experienced by EFL students, influencing their emotional responses and behaviours in social situations.

Answers to Research Question 2

AMOS was employed to investigate the effects of shyness on Bahraini EFL students' academic achievement. Data which were used to address this research questions are (1) students' responses to RCBS (with three components of shyness) and (2) students' academic achievement (the average score of students' final grades). As shown in Table 2, it can be observed that the cognitive shyness showed significant and negative direct effect on students' academic achievement ($\beta = -0.241$, $t = -2.752$, $P < 0.01$). That is to say, the cognitive shyness is a predictor of Bahraini EFL students' academic achievement. Further, the results revealed that the behavioural component of shyness among Bahraini EFL students can demonstrate no significant direct effect on their academic achievement ($\beta = -0.119$, $t = -1.443$, $P > 0.05$). Similarly, the affective shyness had no significant direct effect on students' academic achievement ($\beta = -0.002$, $t = -.036$, $P > 0.05$). In other words, both the behavioural and affective domains of shyness are not significant predictors of academic achievement of Bahraini EFL students. The structural equation model (SEM) analysis conducted using AMOS indicates that cognitive shyness significantly negatively impacts academic achievement, with a path coefficient of -0.24 , suggesting that higher cognitive shyness is associated with lower academic performance. Behavioural shyness also has a small negative effect (-0.12), though it is weaker, while affective shyness shows no significant effect on academic achievement

(0.00). These results emphasize the critical role of cognitive shyness in academic underperformance, with behavioural and affective shyness having less influence in the context of this study. Furthermore, the analysis of the data revealed that the three components of shyness explained only 11.6% of the variance in Bahraini EFL students' academic achievement (Figure 1). This finding indicates that shyness, as assessed through its three distinct domains, accounts for approximately 11.6% of the variability observed in the academic performance. This statistical relationship can suggest that students' levels of shyness, particularly in the identified three domains, can have a noticeable impact on their academic achievement.

Table 2

The Effect of Shyness on Students' Academic Achievement

Path			eta	Estimates	S.E	C.R.	P-value
Achievement	<---	Cognitive	-.241	-5.783	2.101	-2.752	.006
Achievement	<---	Behavioural	-.119	-2.726	1.889	-1.443	.149
Achievement	<---	Affective	-.002	-.053	1.491	-.036	.971

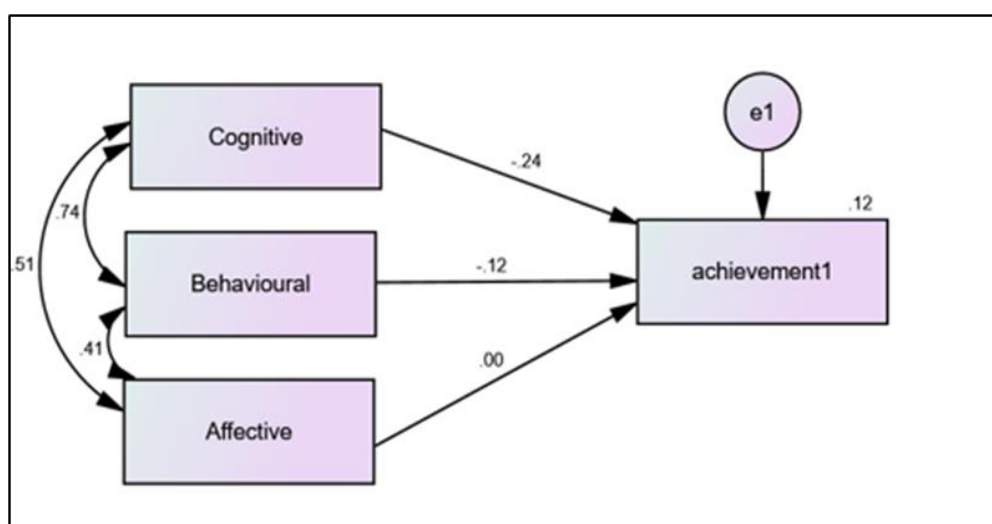


Figure 1. Effect of the three domains of shyness on students' academic achievement

Answers to Research Question 3

In this study, the potential moderating role of students' gender in the relationship between shyness and students' achievement was also examined. This investigation employed some statistical analysis techniques to identify these relationships. Data which were used to address this research question included data from two sources: (1) students' responses to RCBS and (2) students' academic achievement. The analysis began by calculating Pearson correlation coefficients for shyness based on gender. This step was done to understand the relationship between shyness and academic achievement for male and female Bahraini EFL students. Next, the analysis compared these correlation coefficients to determine if there is a significant difference between the correlations for males and females (Table 3).

With reference to data presented in Table 3, it can be observed that the correlation coefficients between cognitive shyness, behavioural shyness, affective shyness, and overall shyness and students' academic achievement do not statistically differ by Bahraini EFL students' gender. In other words, the correlation coefficients between students' academic

achievement and the three domains of shyness and overall shyness among male students are similar to these correlations among female students. Taking these results into account, there is no moderation role of gender in the relation between shyness and academic achievement.

Table 3

Pearson Correlation Coefficients of Shyness by Gender

Variable	Male	Female	Z-score	P-value
Cognitive shyness	-.283**	-.334**	0.36	0.72
Behavioural shyness	-.251**	-.306**	0.48	0.63
Affective shyness	-.136	-.176	0.33	0.74
Shyness (Overall)	-.264**	-.339**	0.66	0.51

Further, in this research question, the moderation effects of gender on the effect of shyness as independent variables on Bahraini EFL students' academic achievement as dependent variable were examined. This was obtained by including an interaction effect in the model and checking to examine where this interaction is statistically significant or not. To do that, all predictors (independent variables) have to be standardized or centred in order to avoid the problem of multicollinearity (Aiken & West, 1991). To determine whether the significance of moderating effect, the effect of interaction term (i.e., the interaction between the moderator and independent variable) on the dependent variable should be significant. Furthermore, the path coefficient was used to evaluate the contribution of each interaction term on the achievement (Table 4).

Table 4

Moderation Role of Gender on the Effects of Shyness on Academic Achievement

Path		β	Estimate	S. E	t-value	P-value	Decision	
Cognitive* Gender	→	Achievement	-.006	-.006	.057	-.107	.915	No moderation
Behavioural* Gender	→	Achievement	.003	.003	.056	.046	.963	No moderation
Affective* Gender	→	Achievement	-.024	-.025	.062	-.403	.687	No moderation
Shyness* Gender	→	Achievement	.020	-.021	.058	-.361	.718	No moderation

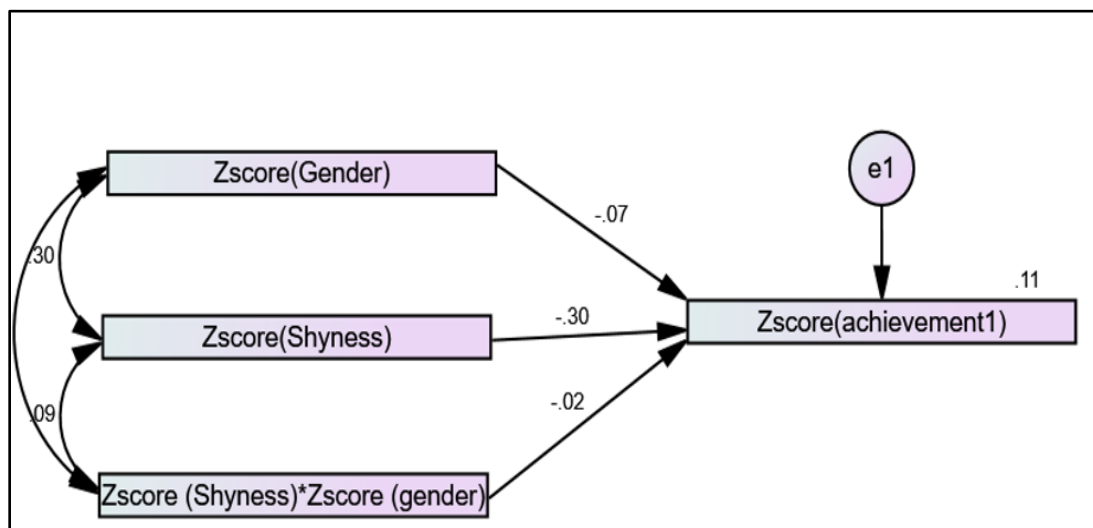


Figure 2. Moderation effect of gender on the relation between overall shyness and academic achievement

As shown in Table 4, the moderation effect of gender on the relations between the following pairs: cognitive shyness and achievement, behavioural shyness and achievement, affective shyness and achievement, and overall shyness and achievement were not statistically significant. Further, Figure 2 presents the results of the moderation effect of gender on the relation between Bahraini EFL students' overall shyness and their academic achievement. The analysis reveals that shyness has a more substantial negative impact on academic achievement than gender. Specifically, higher levels of shyness are associated with lower academic performance, with a moderate negative relationship. In contrast, gender alone has a minimal direct effect on academic achievement. Additionally, the interaction effect between shyness and gender is very small, indicating that gender does not significantly moderate the relationship between shyness and academic achievement in this model. This suggests that the effect of shyness on academic performance is largely independent of gender differences in this context.

Discussion

Level of Shyness among Bahraini EFL Students

The study revealed a moderate level of shyness among Bahraini EFL students. These students often feel social awkwardness, experiencing unease in social situations due to internal anxieties rather than a lack of desire to socialize in English classes. Their sense of being "inhibited" further underscores this feeling of being held back. Cognitive shyness is marked by a fear of negative evaluation or making conversational mistakes, leading to hesitation and restriction in group settings. Additionally, their trouble "thinking of the right things to talk about" highlights how preoccupation with self-presentation hinders their ability to focus on conversation flow and contribute freely, making it difficult for them to come up with conversation topics.

Interestingly, despite these challenges, students who feel confident in their social competence demonstrate a level of self-awareness. This indicates that even though they experience discomfort, Bahraini EFL students do not necessarily doubt their overall social skills. These findings suggest that internal anxieties, such as fear of negative evaluation or

conversational blunders, contribute to feelings of social awkwardness, especially in group settings where there is more pressure to communicate effectively. Cultural norms and expectations in Bahraini society, which emphasize respect and maintaining harmonious relationships (Alnoaimi, 2018), may exacerbate the fear of saying something inappropriate or being judged by others.

Limited English proficiency can also lead to feelings of social awkwardness, as difficulty in finding the right words or expressing oneself clearly can result in hesitancy and self-consciousness. Some students may have limited exposure to social situations in English, particularly if Arabic is their primary language, contributing to discomfort and uncertainty in English-speaking settings. Personality differences, such as introversion or sensitivity to social cues, can further influence feelings of social awkwardness, making social interactions more challenging for naturally shy or reserved students. These findings align with Tang and Schmidt (2017), who reported that socially conflicted individuals often want to interact with others but are hindered by anxiety and fear of social interaction. Past negative experiences, such as being misunderstood or criticized, can also contribute to feelings of social awkwardness, leading students to be more cautious or self-critical in future interactions.

The results highlight that Bahraini EFL students find it challenging to act naturally when meeting new people, which may be related to cultural differences or unfamiliarity with social norms in English-speaking settings. Although many students do not find it overly challenging to talk to strangers, a significant number still experience difficulty, which can trigger behavioural shyness. This lack of confidence underscores the need to develop conversational skills to build confidence in interactions with unfamiliar individuals.

The study revealed that Bahraini EFL students exhibit a moderate level of behavioural shyness when asking for information in English. This can be attributed to varying levels of confidence and assertiveness among students. Asking for information seems to be a source of behavioural shyness, with some students finding it particularly challenging. This underscores the differences in students' confidence and assertiveness. Regarding overcoming shyness, responses indicate that while many students can overcome their shyness in new situations relatively quickly, a significant number still struggle. This suggests that additional support may be needed for those students. In terms of managing eye contact, the results show that most Bahraini EFL students do not experience significant behavioural shyness. While some students may find it difficult to maintain eye contact, it is not perceived as a major challenge. However, even minor difficulties with eye contact can affect students' perceived confidence and communication effectiveness.

Concerning affective shyness, Bahraini EFL students exhibit a moderate level of shyness around members of the opposite sex, reflecting their discomfort in these interactions. The majority of respondents experience this type of affective shyness. One possible explanation is a lack of experience in communicating with the opposite sex, especially in a conservative society like Bahrain. Another interpretation relates to cultural norms, where the interaction between boys and girls can be confusing, leading to affective shyness. Additionally, students report a moderate level of discomfort at social gatherings. This implies a common but not extreme uneasiness, as 37% of respondents do not express this feeling. This type of affective shyness may be linked to personality traits, where some individuals are naturally shy in social

settings. Furthermore, students may feel unsure about how to act or what topics are appropriate in social situations, especially when unfamiliarity is a factor.

The study also found that Bahraini EFL students experience affective shyness in terms of tension with unfamiliar people. Similar to other aspects of affective shyness, there is a moderate level of tension when encountering unfamiliar individuals. This suggests a tendency towards feeling uneasy, but not overwhelmingly so. Responses vary, with some students feeling more relaxed than others, particularly when communicating in English. This variability may be due to language barriers or limited vocabulary, leading to moments of silence and subsequent affective shyness. Cognitive shyness may also play a role, as students' negative self-perceptions and beliefs about social interactions can cause tension with unfamiliar people. Additionally, nervousness with authority figures, another type of affective shyness, was reported at a moderate level. This nervousness is not universal but affects some students, with variability in how they perceive these interactions. Power imbalances and negative past experiences may contribute to this nervousness. In some cultures, a strong dynamic power between students and teachers can intimidate EFL students who are new to the language and learning environment.

Therefore, it can be concluded that affective shyness is a prominent characteristic among Bahraini EFL students in this study, encompassing feelings of tension around unfamiliar people, discomfort at social functions, nervousness with authority figures, and shyness with the opposite sex. These feelings may arise from cultural norms, educational experiences, power imbalances, personal traits, and social interaction expectations. Behavioural shyness is also prevalent, manifesting as difficulty acting naturally with new people, ease in talking to strangers, comfort in asking for information, quickly overcoming shyness, and trouble making eye contact. Additionally, cognitive shyness is evident, marked by social anxiety, challenges in conversation, confidence in social skills, and feeling socially inhibited. These findings align with previous research, such as Mohammadian (2013), who found that Iranian EFL students who reported being shy were less likely to initiate interactions. Similarly, Chu (2008) observed a positive and moderate correlation between shyness and foreign language anxiety in Taiwanese EFL students, while Zimbardo et al. (1977) and Oflaz (2019) also noted shyness among L2 students.

Effect of Shyness on Students' Achievement

The study found that cognitive shyness has a significant and negative direct impact on Bahraini EFL students' academic achievement, indicating that higher levels of cognitive shyness are linked to lower academic performance. In contrast, neither behavioural shyness nor affective shyness showed a significant direct effect on academic achievement, suggesting that these aspects of shyness are not significant predictors of academic success among these students. The analysis revealed that the three components of shyness collectively account for approximately 11.6% of the variability in academic achievement. This suggests that cognitive shyness, in particular, has a noticeable impact on academic performance. Understanding the specific aspects of shyness that contribute to this variance can provide valuable insights into the psychological and social factors influencing EFL students' academic outcomes. Thus, Bahraini EFL students with higher cognitive shyness tend to have lower academic achievement in English language courses. However, behavioural and affective shyness do not significantly influence academic achievement. This raises the question of why cognitive

shyness, specifically, affects academic performance. The significant negative effect of cognitive shyness—characterized by social awkwardness, difficulty in group settings, confidence issues, and general shyness—may lead to lower academic scores.

Possible explanations include reduced class participation; students with high cognitive shyness might be less likely to engage in discussions, ask questions, or seek help from teachers, which can impact their academic performance. Additionally, cognitive shyness may lead to social isolation, hindering the formation of study groups or effective collaboration, which are crucial for learning. Shy students might also underestimate their language abilities and avoid classroom activities due to doubts about their skills, resulting in lower achievement.

The study indicates that behavioural shyness, including comfort in asking for information, overcoming shyness in new situations, and making eye contact, does not affect academic achievement. Similarly, affective shyness, which includes discomfort with unfamiliar people, social events, and interactions with the opposite sex, also does not predict academic success. Two possible interpretations of these results are: first, cultural norms might influence the perception of behavioural shyness, potentially mitigating its impact on academic achievement. In some cultures, behaviours associated with shyness may be more accepted or encouraged. Second, the language learning context itself might be more accommodating, with students feeling more comfortable in structured classroom settings than in informal or social contexts where behavioural shyness might be more pronounced.

Moderating Role of Gender

The results show the moderation effect of gender on the relations between the following three pairs of variables are not statistically significant: (1) cognitive shyness and academic achievement, (2) behavioural shyness and academic achievement, and (3) affective shyness and academic achievement. A possible interpretation of the lack of moderation role of gender can be attributed to cultural norms. Cultural norms and expectations regarding gender roles could minimize the differences in how shyness impact academic achievement between male and female students. In other words, it can be interpreted that both genders in the Bahraini EFL context may face similar pressures and challenges in academic settings, especially when they learn English as a foreign language. Another interpretation can be related to the presence of similar academic expectations among male and female Bahraini EFL students. In other words, academic expectations and pressures may be similar for male and female Bahraini EFL students, resulting in no differential effect of shyness on academic achievement based on gender. The third interpretation is related to social support networks. In other words, it can be assumed that both genders may have access to similar levels of social support, leading to no significant moderation effect by gender.

Conclusions

The study finds that cognitive shyness is prevalent among Bahraini EFL students, often appearing as social awkwardness, inhibition in social settings, and difficulty in generating conversation topics during group discussions. However, students exhibit low levels of cognitive shyness in social competence doubts and inhibition, indicating a disconnect between their internal shyness and external confidence. Their cognitive shyness is moderate and manageable, with tendencies to overthink social interactions and struggle with initiating conversations.

Behavioural shyness is evident in students' inability to appear natural when meeting new people, suggesting lower social adaptability. Despite not reporting significant anxiety when speaking with native speakers, they face challenges in initiating conversations with strangers, indicating a need for improved social adaptability. Additionally, Bahraini EFL students show moderate social confidence, particularly struggling with maintaining eye contact due to cultural norms that discourage it, complicating their adjustment to different social expectations.

Affective shyness is also moderate, with notable discomfort during interactions with the opposite sex and at social events like parties. This likely stems from cultural norms that restrict such communication and a preference for more controlled settings. The students experience tension and nervousness in unfamiliar social situations or with authority figures, indicating underlying social anxiety or shyness. These findings highlight the complex interplay of shyness and cultural factors affecting the social experiences of Bahraini EFL students.

The study reveals that the three components of shyness combined explain 11.6% of the variance in students' academic achievement, indicating that shyness can predict Bahraini EFL students' academic performance. However, other factors also influence academic achievement. The study specifically finds that only cognitive shyness significantly affects students' academic performance. Cognitive shyness, characterized by social awkwardness, difficulty initiating conversations, and lower confidence in social skills, tends to lower academic achievement in Bahraini EFL students.

Additionally, students with high cognitive shyness are less likely to participate in classroom discussions, limiting their opportunities to learn English and hindering their academic performance. This shyness can lead to social isolation, preventing them from benefiting from peer interactions and effective collaboration in English classrooms. Furthermore, cognitive shyness can cause students to doubt their language skills, leading to avoidance of participation and lower academic achievement. Social isolation and decreased motivation and confidence in learning English are further consequences, ultimately impacting academic performance negatively.

The regression analysis of the data shows that there is no significant moderation effect of students' gender on the relationship between foreign language anxiety and shyness on students' academic achievement. In other words, regardless of gender, the moderating effect of shyness remains consistent. Thus, it can be concluded that gender does not play any moderating role in the relations between shyness (including its three components) with students' academic achievement. Further, it can be concluded that there is a case of homogeneity in shyness levels among Bahraini EFL students. It is possible that both male and female students exhibit similar levels of shyness. Further, it may be possible that both male and female students have similar ways to deal with shyness. Hence, it was difficult in this study to detect any moderating effect of gender.

This study contributes to the theoretical understanding of shyness in EFL contexts by highlighting how its cognitive, behavioural, and affective dimensions interact with cultural norms to influence academic achievement. The research establishes that cognitive shyness significantly affects academic performance by limiting classroom participation and fostering

self-doubt, while also revealing the absence of gender differences in how shyness impacts achievement, challenging assumptions about gendered behaviours in EFL learning. Contextually, the study addresses the unique challenges faced by Bahraini EFL students, such as cultural norms affecting social confidence and adaptability, emphasizing the need for culturally responsive teaching strategies. By advocating for pedagogical approaches that target socio-emotional barriers alongside language skills, this research not only deepens theoretical discourse but also provides actionable insights to improve EFL education in the Gulf region and similar cultural settings.

Practical Recommendations

The study on Bahraini EFL students reveals that cognitive, behavioural, and affective shyness significantly impacts their social interactions and academic achievement. To address these challenges, three key pedagogical strategies can be employed: promoting a supportive classroom environment, encouraging participation through structured activities, and addressing behavioural shyness through simulation.

Creating a supportive classroom environment is crucial for alleviating cognitive shyness. Teachers can use ice-breaker activities and structured group discussions to reduce social anxiety and foster a sense of belonging, making students feel more comfortable and engaged. Implementing low-stakes activities, such as structured group tasks and role-playing, allows students to practice English confidently and reduces the pressure of spontaneous conversation, which enhances academic performance. Additionally, addressing behavioural shyness through simulations that mimic real-life interactions helps students develop natural behaviours and improve social adaptability, making it easier for them to initiate conversations and reduce their shyness.

In conclusion, addressing shyness among Bahraini EFL students requires a multifaceted approach. By promoting a supportive environment, encouraging structured participation, and incorporating simulation, educators can help students overcome social anxieties and enhance their academic success.

Suggestions for Future Research

Future research should focus on understanding the cultural factors that contribute to cognitive shyness among Bahraini EFL students. By using qualitative methods, researchers can gain deeper insights into how cultural norms shape students' experiences of social awkwardness and inhibition. It's also important to explore the effectiveness of various intervention programmes, such as cognitive-behavioural techniques or peer learning activities, to see how they might help reduce shyness and boost social skills. Additionally, examining how cognitive shyness affects students' performance in specific language skills like speaking, reading, and writing can provide valuable information. This research can help develop practical strategies to address these challenges and improve students' overall academic experiences.

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