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The Linguistic and Psychological Dimensions of Study Habits and Test Anxiety in EFL/ESL Education

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ABSTRACT

The relationship between study habits (SHs), test anxiety (TA), and academic achievement (AA) is a crucial concern in English as a Foreign/Second Language (EFL/ESL) education, particularly due to the cognitive and psychological challenges language learners face. Effective study habits enhance learning outcomes, while high test anxiety impairs performance, making it essential to explore teacher perspectives on these factors. Despite existing research on academic performance in language learning, limited studies focus on how teachers perceive the interplay between SHs, TA, and AA, especially concerning gender and socio-economic disparities. This study aims to bridge this research gap by investigating EFL/ESL teachers' insights into these challenges and their implications for linguistic competence and student success. A qualitative approach was employed, utilizing online surveys with 15 experienced EFL/ESL teachers. Thematic analysis revealed that structured study habits, such as time management, goal setting, and active learning, significantly improve academic performance. However, high test anxiety, particularly among female and socio-economically disadvantaged students, hinders learning outcomes. The findings underscore the need for educational interventions, including study skills training, stress management programs, and equitable policies. Addressing these challenges can enhance language learning outcomes, align with sustainable education goals, and support national strategies like Saudi Vision 2030. Future research should explore longitudinal strategies and policy-driven solutions to further improve EFL/ESL academic success.

Keywords: Cognitive Linguistics; Psycholinguistics; Study Habits; Test Anxiety; Academic Achievement; EFL/ESL Education

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ARTICLE INFO

Received: 2 April 2025; Revised: 14 April 2025; Accepted: 18 April 2025; Published Online: 21 April 2025

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.30564/fls.v7i5.9096>

CITATION

Sharma, V.K., Holbah, W.A., Hamdi, S.A., 2025. The Linguistic and Psychological Dimensions of Study Habits and Test Anxiety in EFL/ESL Education. *Forum for Linguistic Studies*. 7(5): 1–15. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.30564/fls.v7i5.9096>

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1. Introduction

Language learning is a multifaceted process influenced by both linguistic and psychological factors, including cognitive skills, study habits (SHs), and test anxiety (TA). For English as a Foreign/Second Language (EFL/ESL) learner, the ability to develop effective study strategies while managing performance anxiety is crucial for academic success. The intersection of cognitive-linguistic development and psychological well-being plays a vital role in shaping learners' academic performance, particularly in high-stakes language assessment environments. Despite extensive attention to the roles of SHs and TA, the theoretical integration of these constructs and their practical implications from a teacher's perspective remain underexplored.

This study is anchored in Self-Regulated Learning Theory and Cognitive-Behavioral Theory of Test Anxiety as its guiding frameworks^[1, 2]. These models respectively conceptualize how learners develop goal-oriented learning behaviors and how psychological stress impacts cognitive performance. Using this dual-lens approach allows the study to investigate not only how SHs and TA manifest in EFL/ESL classrooms, but also how teachers interpret and respond to these phenomena. Study habits refer to purposeful strategies like time management, goal setting, note-taking, and active learning practices^[3]. Numerous studies affirm that such behaviors correlate strongly with improved academic outcomes in language learning^[4, 6]. However, many students exhibit difficulties in sustaining effective habits, often resulting in heightened levels of test anxiety, which impairs performance and self-efficacy^[7, 8].

Test anxiety is a well-documented psychological barrier to academic achievement, particularly in language learning settings where communication apprehension and performance pressure exacerbate anxiety^[9, 10]. A meta-analysis demonstrated that academic anxiety^[11], including TA, significantly affects student performance, although its impact varies based on socio-demographic factors. Additionally, research indicates that TA manifests in cognitive, emotional, and behavioral symptoms, impairing students' ability to retrieve and apply knowledge effectively^[12, 13].

Gender differences in SHs and TA levels have also been widely studied. While female students often exhibit more structured study habits, they simultaneously experience higher levels of test anxiety than their male counter-

parts, which can negatively influence their academic performance^[7, 14–16]. Additionally, socio-economic disparities contribute to variations in students' academic success, as access to educational resources and learning support significantly impacts SHs and anxiety levels^[17–19]. This study's unique contribution lies in its cross-cultural approach to examining EFL/ESL teacher perspectives on SHs and TA, incorporating qualitative insights from unexplored regions. It addresses gaps by exploring the intersection of gender, socio-economic status, and educational strategies, offering a holistic understanding of academic challenges in diverse linguistic settings.

Existing research has also highlighted gender-based differences in both SHs and TA. Female learners tend to demonstrate more structured study strategies but simultaneously report higher anxiety levels, which can negate their academic advantage^[7, 14–16]. Additionally, socioeconomic status (SES) plays a pivotal role in shaping learners' experiences; those from higher SES backgrounds often have better access to educational support systems, while learners from disadvantaged backgrounds face greater emotional and material barriers^[17–19].

This study underscores the importance of understanding the interrelated factors affecting EFL learners' academic outcomes. EFL teachers are uniquely positioned to offer insights into these dynamics, which can guide effective interventions and support mechanisms tailored to learners' needs^[19, 20]. Despite growing research on SHs and TA, critical gaps persist in understanding these constructs from the perspective of teachers, who perceive firsthand how these factors affect student learning. Teachers possess a nuanced understanding of the behavioral, emotional, and contextual elements that influence academic outcomes, making their insights indispensable for designing practical, evidence-based interventions. This is especially relevant in rapidly evolving educational landscapes, such as Saudi Arabia, where Vision 2030 emphasizes the development of an English-proficient, cognitively resilient workforce to meet global standards.

Given these complexities, there is a critical need to bridge cognitive, linguistic, and psychological research to develop targeted interventions for EFL/ESL learners. Teachers play a pivotal role in guiding students toward effective study strategies while mitigating anxiety through tailored instructional approaches^[21, 22]. This study therefore

seeks to address these gaps by investigating how EFL/ESL teachers perceive and interpret the relationship between SHs, TA, and AA. It also explores how these perceptions vary with respect to gender and SES differences and how teachers recommend addressing these challenges. By grounding this investigation in theoretical frameworks and critical review of prior studies, the research aspires to bridge scholarly theory with classroom realities.

This qualitative study intends to explore the perspectives of EFL/ESL teachers on these interconnected factors and their influence on student achievement and further aims to attain the given main objectives:

- 1) To explore EFL/ESL teachers' perceptions of the relationship between students' SHs and AA.
- 2) To gain insights into how TA manifests among students and its impact on AA.
- 3) To examine gender-based differences in SHs and TA levels and their influence on academic outcomes.
- 4) To investigate the role of socio-economic factors, such as family background and access to resources, in shaping SHs and TA levels.
- 5) To identify effective strategies and interventions recommended by EFL/ESL teachers for fostering productive SHs and managing TA to enhance academic success.

To achieve these objectives, this study employs a qualitative, phenomenological design using online surveys with experienced EFL/ESL teachers across several countries. This approach not only allows for a contextualized understanding of teacher experiences but also provides practice-oriented insights for addressing the complex relationship between SHs, TA, and AA. The thematic analysis of teacher narratives will enrich the literature by identifying patterns and proposing interventions rooted in actual classroom experience. In addition, by investigating the perspectives of EFL teachers, this study seeks to address gaps in literature and provide actionable insights for supporting language learners. The findings aim to contribute to the broader understanding of SHs, TA, and AA, particularly within the context of language education. Enhanced awareness and informed strategies can help educators, policymakers, and stakeholders foster environments conducive to academic success for EFL/ESL learners. This foundation necessitates a detailed exploration of the previous works to understand how students' study habits, test-taking anxiety and socioeconomic environ-

ment contribute to achieving the intended objectives.

The interplay between study habits (SHs), test anxiety (TA), and academic achievement (AA) has been widely examined in educational research, yet limited studies specifically focus on English as a Foreign/Second Language (EFL/ESL) learner. Understanding how cognitive and psychological factors influence language learning is essential for developing effective pedagogical interventions^[21]. Research consistently highlights that effective study habits, such as time management, structured revision, and active learning strategies, are positively correlated with academic success^[23, 24]. In particular, EFL/ESL learners benefit from self-regulated learning techniques, which facilitate vocabulary acquisition, grammatical comprehension, and communication skills^[4-6, 8, 25]. Within language education, teachers play a critical role in guiding students toward effective study practices, reinforcing that structured instruction can significantly enhance learning outcomes^[20, 26].

While study habits contribute to academic success, test anxiety (TA) is a major psychological factor that negatively impacts EFL/ESL learners' performance. High levels of test-related stress impair cognitive processing, information recall, and exam performance, particularly in language learning contexts where oral proficiency and communicative competence are frequently assessed^[10, 27]. Studies indicate a strong correlation between TA and poor academic performance, with students experiencing heightened anxiety and struggling to demonstrate their actual knowledge and skills^[5, 9, 22]. However, some research suggests that TA alone does not predict academic failure, as other factors such as preparation levels and instructional support also influence performance outcomes^[28]. The cognitive, emotional, and behavioral components of TA, including self-doubt, avoidance behaviors, and physiological stress responses, contribute to performance deficits among EFL/ESL learners^[12, 29].

Gender differences further shape study habits and test anxiety levels in language learning. Research consistently shows that female students demonstrate more organized study behaviors, including meticulous note-taking and structured revision plans, leading to higher academic performance^[16]. However, despite their effective learning strategies, female learners report greater test anxiety, which can undermine their academic potential^[7, 14, 15]. In EFL/ESL

contexts, language learning anxiety among female students is often linked to perfectionism and communication apprehension, highlighting the need for gender-sensitive academic support interventions^[14].

Beyond individual cognitive and psychological factors, socio-economic status (SES) significantly impacts study habits, test anxiety, and academic achievement. Learners from higher-income backgrounds benefit from greater access to educational resources, private tutoring, and technologically enhanced learning environments, leading to improved study habits and reduced anxiety^[21, 30]. Conversely, students from lower-income backgrounds face higher levels of academic stress, limited exposure to linguistic resources, and increased anxiety due to financial constraints^[17, 31]. These disparities are particularly evident in language learning, where access to language-rich environments and digital learning tools significantly influences EFL/ESL learners' academic trajectories. Addressing these SES-related inequalities through targeted educational policies can help bridge the achievement gap^[21].

The existing literature underscores the complex relationship between SHs, TA, and AA, particularly within EFL/ESL education. While effective study habits enhance linguistic and academic proficiency, test anxiety remains a significant barrier to success, especially among female students and socio-economically disadvantaged learners. However, gaps remain in understanding how teachers perceive and address these challenges in language classrooms^[19, 20]. Investigating EFL/ESL teachers' insights into SHs and TA can provide valuable strategies for fostering effective learning habits and anxiety management techniques, ultimately contributing to evidence-based educational interventions that enhance language learning outcomes.

2. Materials and Methods

This qualitative investigation adopts a phenomenological research design, aiming to explore EFL/ESL teachers' lived experiences and perspectives on the relationship between study habits (SHs), test anxiety (TA), and academic achievement (AA). The study employs semi-structured online surveys administered through Google Forms to gather in-depth, narrative-driven responses. This method facilitates asynchronous participation from educators across dif-

ferent countries, allowing for flexibility and inclusivity.

2.1. Participants and Sampling

A purposive sample of 15 experienced EFL/ESL teachers was selected from a diverse range of educational institutions across eight countries: India, Bangladesh, Nepal, Yemen, Egypt, Sudan, Saudi Arabia, and Pakistan. Participants were chosen based on three main criteria:

- (a) a minimum of five years of EFL/ESL teaching experience,
- (b) active engagement in classroom instruction (either at secondary or tertiary levels), and
- (c) willingness to reflect on and articulate their professional experiences related to SHs, TA, and AA.

The sample size of 15 was determined based on the principle of data saturation, where no new themes emerged after initial rounds of coding and thematic review. While small in number, the participants provided information-rich, cross-contextual narratives that allowed for a comprehensive understanding of the phenomena under investigation.

To ensure balanced representation, participants included both male and female teachers, with teaching experience ranging from 6 to 27 years. Approximately 53% of participants were male and 47% were female. Teachers represented a range of institutional types including public and private universities. Their educational backgrounds spanned master's to doctoral levels, with most holding degrees in English, applied linguistics, or education.

A summary of participant demographics is as follows (**Table 1**).

2.2. Research Questions

The study is directed by the following five research questions designed to investigate linguistic and psychological dimensions of SHs and TA in EFL/ESL education:

- (1) How do EFL/ESL teachers perceive the relationship between students' study habits and their academic performance?
- (2) In what ways does test anxiety affect EFL/ESL students' academic outcomes?
- (3) What gender-based distinctions exist in study habits and test anxiety among EFL/ESL students?
- (4) How do socio-economic factors, such as family

background and access to resources, influence study habits and test anxiety?

(5) What strategies or interventions do teachers recommend to enhance study habits and mitigate test anxiety?

Table 1. Summary of Participant Demographics.

Demographic Detail	Description
Gender	8 male, 7 female
Age Range	30 to 55 years
Teaching Levels	Tertiary
Years of Experience	Mean = 12.7 years
Countries Represented	8 (India, Bangladesh, Nepal, Yemen, Egypt, Sudan, Saudi Arabia, Pakistan)
Educational Background	MA (English/Linguistics/Education), PhD
Institutional Type	Government (4), Private (11)

These open-ended questions encouraged teachers to reflect freely on their observations and experiences. Follow-up prompts were used to deepen responses where necessary, providing further granularity to emergent themes.

2.3. Cross-Cultural and Ethical Considerations

Given the cross-national scope of the study, cultural and educational differences were considered during data analysis and interpretation. For example, perceptions of test anxiety may be influenced by cultural attitudes toward academic failure, societal expectations, and teacher-student dynamics. In some contexts (e.g., South Asia), high parental pressure and exam-centric education systems may intensify anxiety, while in others (e.g., parts of the Middle East), exam stress might be linked more to linguistic competence and access to learning resources. Similarly, linguistic environments varied; while some participants taught in immersive English-medium settings, others operated in bilingual or multilingual contexts. These differences were coded and analyzed contextually to avoid overgeneralization and to preserve cultural authenticity in reporting findings.

This study adhered to ethical research practices as per international qualitative research standards. Prior to participation, each respondent received a research information sheet outlining the study's objectives, voluntary nature of participation, and intended use of data. Informed consent was obtained electronically via phone and WhatsApp. Participants were assured of anonymity and confidentiality, and

no identifying personal or institutional information was collected. The data was stored securely and used solely for academic research purposes.

2.4. Data Collection and Analysis

Data were collected using semi-structured, open-ended questionnaires designed to elicit reflective and experience-based responses from teachers. Responses were collected asynchronously over a period of four weeks and translated where necessary to maintain consistency in coding.

The analytical framework follows Braun and Clarke's thematic analysis approach^[32], implementing a systematic six-stage process. The process begins with data familiarization, where researchers transcribe and repeatedly read participant responses to immerse themselves in the data. This is followed by coding, during which meaningful patterns within the data are systematically identified and coded. The third stage involves theme development, where related codes are grouped into broader conceptual categories. Theme review constitutes the fourth stage, wherein preliminary themes are reviewed and refined to ensure accurate representation of the data. In the fifth stage, theme definition, each theme is precisely defined, and appropriate descriptive labels are assigned. The process culminates in report production, where a detailed report is created, incorporating rich contextual examples from participant responses.

To enhance analytical accuracy, the research utilizes NVivo qualitative analysis software for efficient data organi-

zation, coding, and interpretation. Two independent coders conducted thematic analysis. Inter-coder reliability was achieved through discussion and consensus-building sessions, ensuring consistency in theme development. Member checking was also conducted, wherein selected participants reviewed summaries of their responses for accuracy. This methodology enabled the study to uncover nuanced, culturally situated, and psychologically informed insights into the academic challenges faced by EFL/ESL learners, as observed by their teachers. The resulting themes formed the basis for the results and discussion sections that followed.

3. Results

This study presents a thematic analysis of responses collected from 15 EFL/ESL teachers across eight countries through semi-structured questionnaires. The findings capture quantitative patterns observed in coded responses and are substantiated with qualitative excerpts that add authen-

ticity and depth. Percentages represent response trends based on the coding of thematic mentions.

3.1. Study Habits vs. Academic Performance

Figure 1 shows a positive correlation between effective study habits and academic performance comparing academic scores (average grades) of students with low, moderate, and high SHs. Students with high SHs scored, on average, 18 to 22% higher than their peers. Categories like regular study routines, active engagement, and motivation are key contributors to higher academic success. These findings align with a few scholarly works^[3, 20], which emphasized the significance of behaviors like time management and study planning in achieving academic excellence. Over 86% of teachers highlighted those students with consistent study habits, such as time management, note-taking, and active review, demonstrated significantly higher academic performance. Responses indicated that goal-oriented routines and self-monitoring behaviors were key to success.

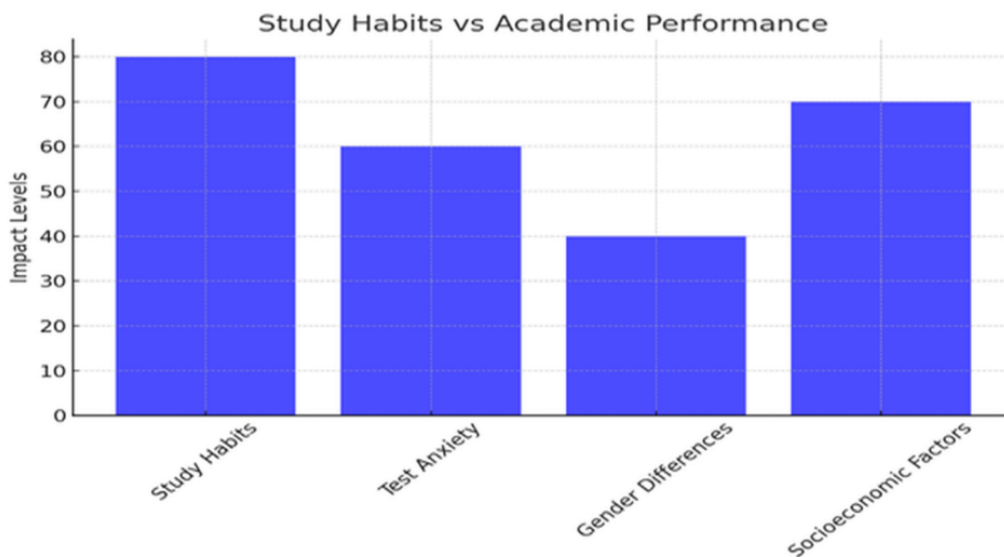


Figure 1. Study Habits vs. Academic Performance.

“The students who create a structured study routine, stay focused during class, and consistently review the material perform significantly better than those who lack these habits.” — Teacher from Bangladesh.

3.2. Gender Differences in Test Anxiety

Figure 2 illustrates that females generally exhibit higher TA levels (64%) than males (36%). This trend might be attributed to societal expectations or perfectionistic tendencies often reported in female learners. We find that

gender-based psychological and cultural differences significantly influence how students experience and manage test-related stress. Voyer and Voyer’s meta-analysis found that females generally outperformed males in academic settings; however, they tend to experience higher levels of test anxiety compared to their male counterparts^[7, 14, 16]. 73% of par-

Participants observed that female students exhibit higher levels of test anxiety compared to males. While females tended to be more organized in their study habits, anxiety often interfered with their ability to perform in assessments.

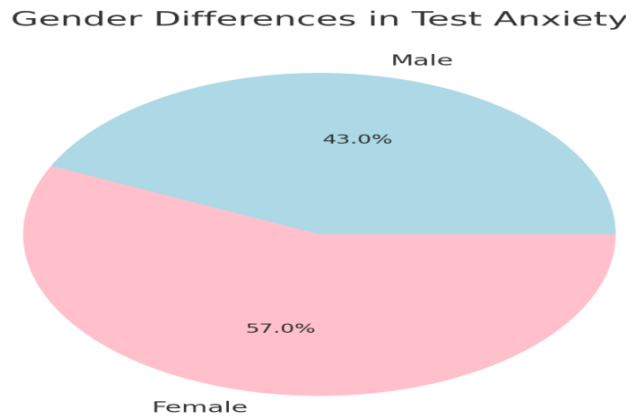


Figure 2. Gender Differences in Test Anxiety.

"Many of my female students study more consistently, yet they are more anxious and less confident during tests than male students." — Teacher from Egypt.

3.3. Performance Levels by Socioeconomic Group

Figure 3 showing performance gradient illustrates that students from higher-SES groups scored 15 to 25% higher than lower-SES peers, based on teacher assessments. Performance levels show a direct relationship with socioeconomic background. Students from higher-income families or educated households tend to perform better, likely due to greater

access to resources and a supportive learning environment. Teachers reported a direct link between socio-economic status (SES) and student performance. Higher-SES students were described as having better access to resources, study environments, and technology, translating to improved academic performance. Sirin highlights that socioeconomic status is one of the strongest predictors of academic outcomes, emphasizing resource availability as a critical factor^[33].

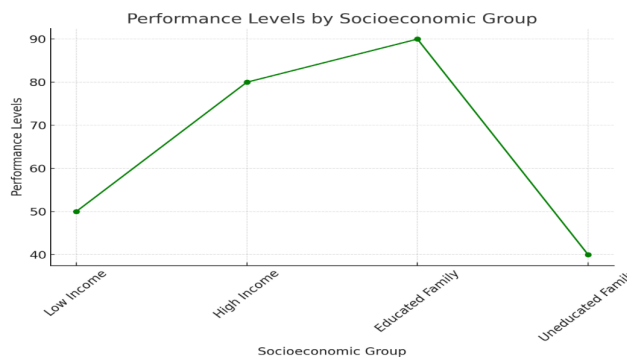


Figure 3. Performance Levels by Socioeconomic Group.

"Students from privileged backgrounds receive better guidance at home and are less stressed about academic hurdles." — Teacher from Nepal.

3.4. Correlation Between Study Habits and Performance

Figure 4 confirms a direct, positive relationship between effective SHs and AA in both the thematic frequency (100% mention) and visual scatter analysis. As SHs im-

prove, performance levels increase, highlighting the importance of skillful learning strategies. Zimmerman and Schunk and Sharma argue that self-regulated learning habits are essential for student success, particularly in language acquisition contexts^[1, 20].

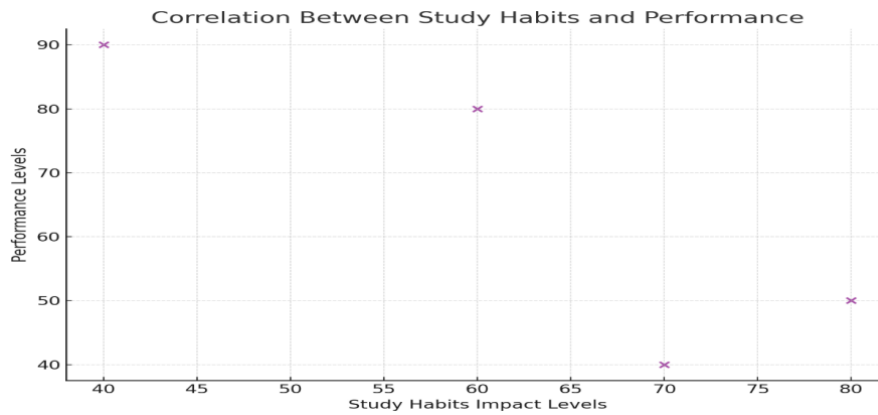


Figure 4. Correlation Between Study Habits and Performance.

“Self-regulated learners tend to ask insightful questions, manage their assignments efficiently, and show consistent progress.” — Teacher from India.

3.5. Impact of Anxiety and Study Habits

Figure 5 visualizes how anxiety levels and SHs vary across different student groups. It shows that female students exhibit higher anxiety levels, while effective SHs positively impact performance across all groups. The analysis across gender and SES indicated that students with effec-

tive SHs consistently outperformed their peers, even if they experienced mild-to-moderate TA. However, high TA combined with weak SHs resulted in the lowest performance group. The previous studies emphasize that anxiety is a multifaceted phenomenon, with emotional, cognitive, and environmental factors influencing its impact on academic outcomes^[13, 20].

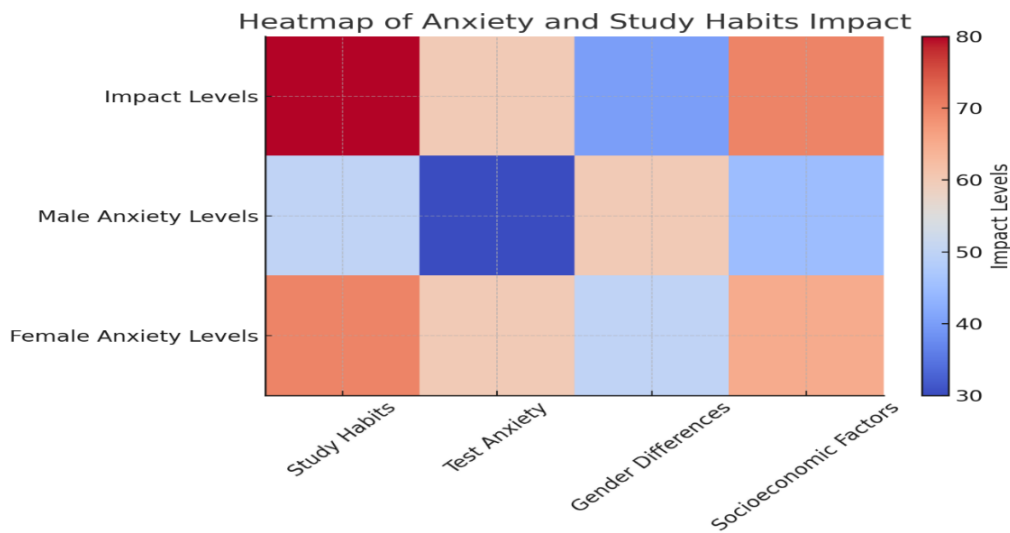


Figure 5. Impact of Anxiety and Study Habits.

“Some students can handle anxiety if they prepare well, but those with no study structure and high stress usually collapse under pressure.” — Teacher from Pakistan.

3.6. Multi-Factor Analysis: TA, SHs, and AA

Figure 6 illustrates the interplay between TA, SHs, and AA. Female students tend to experience higher anxiety, which influences their SHs and ultimately their academic success. This three-way analysis revealed that female students with strong SHs but high TA performed 10 to 12%

lower than their male peers with moderate SHs and lower anxiety. This complex interplay indicates the amplifying role of TA in moderating academic performance, even in high-performing groups. The findings support research by Cassady and Johnson^[34], which indicates that TA can significantly impede performance, especially under high-pressure conditions.

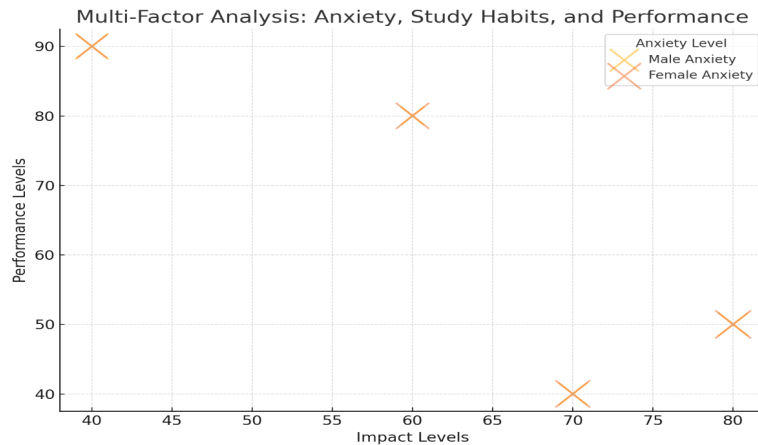


Figure 6. Multi-Factor Analysis: TA, SHs, and AA.

“Even the most prepared students can underperform if test anxiety overwhelms their mental state.” — Teacher from Yemen.

3.7. Skill Comparison: ESL vs. EFL

Figure 7 shows ESL students scoring 15 to 20% higher in language skills across the board. Teachers noted that ESL students consistently outperformed EFL students in all

four language skill areas, listening, speaking, reading, and writing, primarily due to greater language immersion. This supports Bialystok^[35], who found that ESL learners benefit from immersive environments, leading to improved language proficiency across all four skills.

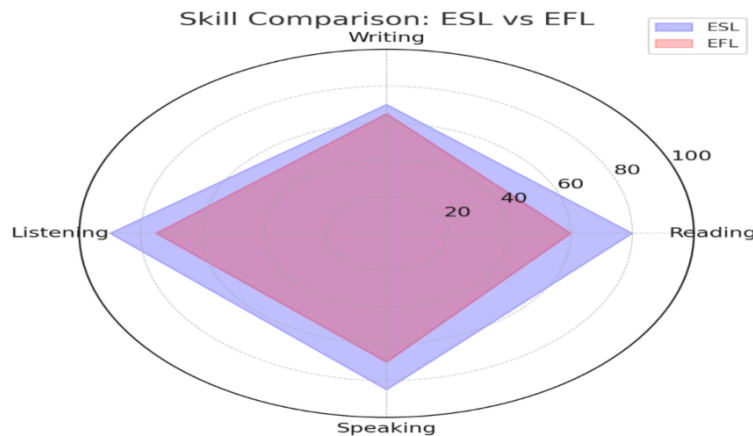


Figure 7. Skill Comparison: ESL vs. EFL.

Our EFL students lack exposure beyond the classroom, which puts them at a disadvantage compared to ESL learners who use English daily.” — Teacher from Sudan.

4. Discussion

These visualizations demonstrate the complex interplay of linguistic and psychological factors in shaping study habits (SHs), test anxiety (TA), and academic achievement (AA) in EFL/ESL education. The findings reinforce that cognitive engagement, emotional well-being, and socioeconomic conditions significantly influence language learners’ academic performance. Given the dual impact of study behaviors and anxiety levels, integrating cognitive-

linguistic approaches with psychological interventions can enhance student success in second language acquisition.

The study aligns with previous research while expanding on the specific challenges faced by EFL/ESL learners in developing effective SHs and coping with TA. The results highlight that explicit pedagogical interventions addressing both academic and emotional barriers can improve outcomes for language learners. These insights directly support the research objectives, particularly the need to identify how SHs and TA influence academic performance and to ex-

plore effective strategies for mitigating test-related anxiety in language learning contexts.

4.1. Relationship between Study Habits and Academic Achievement

The results confirm that structured study habits enhance linguistic proficiency and overall academic success, validating previous findings on self-regulated learning and cognitive engagement^[8, 25]. In addition, teachers' emphasis on structured support echoes Sharma's recommendations for transforming EFL teaching practices to address learners' needs^[19, 20]. However, the qualitative perspectives of teachers add a nuanced understanding of how study behaviors influence second-language learning in different cultural and educational settings.

Moreover, the observed challenges in cultivating self-regulated learning habits among EFL/ESL students directly address Research Question 1, which explores the relationship between SHs and AA. The findings suggest that students who lack effective study strategies struggle with language retention, fluency, and exam performance, reinforcing the need for teacher-led interventions. This supports the study's objective of identifying practical methods for fostering study habits in EFL/ESL learners.

The EFL/ESL teachers unanimously acknowledged the critical role of effective SHs in shaping their students' academic performance. Several participants shared specific examples of how students who demonstrated strong time management skills, active note-taking, and regular review and practice tended to achieve higher academic outcomes. One teacher from Bangladesh noted, "The students who create a structured study routine, stay focused during class, and consistently review the material perform significantly better than those who lack these habits."

However, the teachers also highlighted the challenges they face in cultivating effective SHs among their EF/SL learners. As a teacher from Nepal explained, "Many of our students struggle with self-regulation and procrastination, which negatively impacts their ability to develop consistent study practices." The teachers emphasized the need for explicit instruction in time management, organization, and active learning strategies.

4.2. Manifestation of TA and Its Impact

The EFL/ESL teachers shared extensive observations on how TA manifests among their students and affects their academic performance. Several participants described instances of students experiencing physical symptoms, such as sweating, shaking, and racing heartbeats, during assessments. As a teacher from Yemen expressed, "I've seen bright students who freeze up and perform poorly on exams due to their overwhelming anxiety, despite knowing the content well."

The teachers also noted distinct behavioral patterns, such as avoidance, procrastination, and negative self-talk, among their anxious students. A teacher from Egypt shared, "Some of my students become so paralyzed by TA that they refuse to even attempt the exam, resulting in failing grades."

The teachers emphasized that the cognitive and emotional components of TA often intersect, leading to a detrimental impact on their students' AA. As a participant from Pakistan explained, "The debilitating worry and self-doubt that my students experience during tests significantly impairs their ability to recall information and demonstrate their true understanding of the subject matter."

The EFL teachers' detailed descriptions of the cognitive, emotional, and behavioral manifestations of test anxiety among their students corroborate the existing research on this phenomenon. Scholars have similarly reported the detrimental impact of heightened test anxiety on academic performance, highlighting the complex interplay between these factors^[9, 10, 25].

The teachers' observations of how test anxiety can impair their students' ability to demonstrate their true understanding aligns with the findings of Bados, Gómez-Benito, and Balaguer^[12], who emphasized the importance of differentiating between state and trait anxiety in the context of academic achievement. Addressing the various dimensions of test anxiety through targeted interventions can be crucial for supporting EFL learners' success.

4.3. Gender Differences in SHs and TA

The EF/SL teachers reported observing distinct patterns in SHs and TA levels between male and female students. Several participants noted that female students generally exhibited more organized and consistent study be-

haviors, such as maintaining detailed notes, creating study schedules, and actively seeking help when needed. As a teacher from India shared, “My female students tend to be more diligent in their learning strategies, which translates to better performance on assessments.”

In contrast, the teachers described their male students as more prone to procrastination and a casual approach to studying. A participant from Sudan remarked, “The male students in my classes often struggle with time management and struggle to maintain focus, which then leads to higher levels of TA and poorer academic outcomes.”

However, the teachers also acknowledged that these gender-based differences were not absolute, and individual variations existed within both groups. As a teacher from Bangladesh emphasized, “While there are some general trends, it’s important not to make blanket assumptions, as I’ve had both male and female students who defy these patterns.”

The EFL teachers’ reported observations of gender-based distinctions in study habits and test anxiety levels resonate with the existing body of research. Voyer and Voyer’s meta-analysis found that females generally outperformed males in academic settings^[16], which the researchers attributed, in part, to differences in study strategies and approaches. Similarly, studies have indicated that female students tend to experience higher levels of test anxiety compared to their male counterparts^[7, 14].

The teachers’ caution against making blanket assumptions and their acknowledgment of individual variations within each gender group align with the need for a nuanced understanding of these gender-based patterns. As Sharma emphasizes, considering the unique challenges and perspectives of diverse EFL learners is crucial for developing effective support mechanisms^[19, 30].

4.4. Influence of Socio-economic Factors

The findings confirm the urgent need for targeted interventions that address both cognitive-linguistic and psychological challenges in EFL/ESL education. The study highlights the importance of a dual approach, enhancing study skills while simultaneously implementing anxiety-reducing techniques—to optimize language learning outcomes. The EFL/ESL teachers highlighted the significant impact of socio-economic factors on their students’ study habits and test anx-

iety levels. Participants from various countries shared observations of how access to educational resources, family support, and socio-economic background influenced their learners’ academic experiences.

As a teacher from Nepal explained, “Students from more affluent families tend to have better access to learning materials, private tutoring, and a home environment that encourages academic success, which positively impacts their SHs and confidence.” In contrast, teachers from Yemen, Egypt, and Sudan noted that students from lower socio-economic backgrounds often faced challenges, such as limited access to technology, inadequate learning spaces at home, and financial pressures, which contributed to higher levels of test anxiety and poorer academic performance.

The teachers emphasized the need for educational institutions and policymakers to address these socio-economic disparities through targeted interventions and resource allocation to support EFL/ESL learners from diverse backgrounds. As a participant from Pakistan remarked, “Providing equitable access to educational resources and support services can go a long way in helping our students develop effective SHs and manage test-related anxiety.”

The EFL/ESL teachers’ insights on the significant impact of socio-economic factors on their students’ study habits and test anxiety levels are consistent with the existing literature. Researchers have highlighted the influential role of family background, access to educational resources, and socio-economic status in shaping students’ academic experiences and outcomes^[17, 18].

The teachers’ observations of how students from more affluent backgrounds tend to have better access to learning materials and support, leading to improved study habits and academic performance, align with the findings of Sharma’s research on Saudi EFL learners^[19]. Addressing these socio-economic disparities through targeted interventions and resource allocation is crucial for promoting equity and enhancing the academic success of EFL students from diverse backgrounds. However, Caviola et al. revealed that sociodemographic factors such as age, gender, etc., had limited controlling effects^[11].

This study confirms that study habits and test anxiety are interwoven cognitive and psychological factors influencing EFL/ESL learning outcomes. The findings directly answer the research questions and validate the study objec-

tives, reinforcing the need for pedagogical and institutional interventions that support self-regulated learning and anxiety management in second-language education. Future research should explore longitudinal interventions and cross-cultural comparisons to further refine evidence-based approaches for improving academic success among language learners.

4.5. Recommended Strategies and Interventions

This discussion responds to RQ5 by identifying strategies teachers consider most effective for enhancing SHs and reducing TA. It highlights the linguistic and psychological dimensions of study habits (SHs) and test anxiety (TA) in EFL/ESL education, emphasizing the need for targeted interventions to improve academic achievement (AA). Teachers stress the importance of integrating structured study habits, anxiety management strategies, and socio-economic support to enhance learning outcomes. In addition, explicit instruction in study skills, including time management, note-taking, and exam preparation, is essential for fostering self-regulated learning^[8, 20]. Findings indicate that EFL/ESL learners with strong study strategies perform better academically, making study skills workshops a valuable addition to curricula.

Mental health support is crucial in mitigating TA-related academic struggles. Teachers advocate for counseling services, mindfulness programs, and anxiety workshops to help students manage test-related stress and boost confidence^[10]. Addressing emotional well-being alongside academic preparedness fosters a resilient student body. Moreover, collaborative learning, through peer-assisted study groups, mentorship, and cooperative learning, enhances student engagement, motivation, and language acquisition. These interactive approaches reduce performance anxiety and accelerate second-language proficiency.

Differentiated instruction ensures greater inclusivity by catering to diverse learning styles. Findings suggest that students receiving tailored instruction demonstrate improved comprehension and retention, reducing academic pressure and enhancing overall performance. Also, parental engagement is a key factor in reinforcing effective study habits and reducing TA. Strong home-school partnerships, including parent-teacher meetings and academic support

workshops, significantly enhance student motivation and confidence^[20, 21]. Lastly, socio-economic disparities hinder EFL/ESL learners' access to educational resources, negatively impacting study habits and increasing TA^[17, 31]. To address this, institutions should offer financial aid, free digital resources, and academic counseling services to bridge the achievement gap.

A multi-faceted intervention framework, combining academic support, psychological well-being initiatives, collaborative learning, and socio-economic assistance, can create a more inclusive and effective learning environment. Findings suggest that teacher training programs should integrate modules on test anxiety awareness, socio-cultural sensitivity, and study skills facilitation to better equip instructors. Policymakers are encouraged to allocate resources for school-based counseling services and digital access for disadvantaged learners, promoting equity and mental wellness in EFL/ESL classrooms.

4.6. Limitations of the Study

While this study provides rich qualitative insights, certain limitations should be acknowledged. First, the use of a small, purposive sample of 15 teachers, although appropriate for phenomenological inquiry, limits the generalizability of the findings. Second, the cross-sectional nature of the data offers a snapshot of teacher perceptions without tracking changes over time. Third, while teachers were drawn from multiple countries, cultural variations in conceptualizing test anxiety and learning strategies may have influenced their responses, and these cultural nuances warrant further exploration.

5. Conclusions

This study explored the linguistic and psychological dimensions of study habits (SHs) and test anxiety (TA) in EFL/ESL education and their influence on academic achievement (AA), using the reflective perspectives of experienced teachers from diverse socio-cultural contexts. The findings underscore that structured study habits significantly enhance student performance, while high levels of test anxiety, especially among female students and those from socio-economically disadvantaged backgrounds, adversely impact academic outcomes. These insights rein-

force the importance of integrating study skills training, mental health support, and inclusive pedagogy into language learning frameworks.

By drawing on teachers' first-hand experiences, this study contributes to a deeper understanding of the interplay between cognitive strategies and emotional well-being in language education. The research aligns with the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) by promoting equity, quality education, and gender sensitivity. It also supports Saudi Vision 2030, offering recommendations to enhance human capital and educational quality within the Kingdom. However, the implications extend well beyond Saudi Arabia: the findings are equally relevant to multilingual and multicultural EFL/ESL settings worldwide, particularly in countries where learners face similar socio-economic, psychological, and instructional challenges. The emphasis on teacher-informed practices and cross-cultural variability makes the outcomes broadly applicable in designing effective language education policies and interventions.

Future research could build upon the current study by conducting longitudinal investigations to examine how interventions in study habits (SHs) and test anxiety (TA) evolve over time and influence language learning outcomes. Incorporating student perspectives alongside those of teachers would enrich the analysis, offering a more comprehensive and balanced understanding of the learner's experience. Expanding the participant pool to include teachers from underrepresented regions and varied institutional contexts, such as rural schools, private institutions, and international settings—would facilitate deeper cross-cultural comparisons and enhance the global applicability of findings. Furthermore, researchers should explore the impact of digital tools and AI-driven platforms in promoting effective study behaviors and reducing test-related anxiety in both online and blended learning environments. Finally, a focused investigation into the intersectionality of gender, socio-economic status (SES), and learning environments would help in designing customized and equitable support systems tailored to the diverse needs of EFL/ESL learners.

Therefore, this research contributes to a growing body of scholarship on learner psychology in language education and highlights the pivotal role teachers play in fostering effective, empathetic, and equitable learning environments. By addressing both the cognitive and emotional di-

mensions of EFL/ESL learning, this study offers meaningful insights for educators, policymakers, and researchers seeking to transform language education in locally grounded yet globally responsive ways.

Author Contributions

Conceptualization, V.S., W.A.H. and S.H.; methodology, V.S. and S.H.; resources, V.S. and W.A.H.; formal analysis, V.S.; investigation, V.S.; data curation, V.S.; writing—original draft preparation, V.S.; writing—review and editing, W.A.H. and S.H.; visualization, S.H.; supervision, S.H.; funding acquisition, W.A.H. All authors have read and agreed to the published version of the manuscript.

Funding

The authors gratefully acknowledge the funding of the Deanship of Graduate Studies and Scientific Research, Jazan University, Saudi Arabia, through project number: **RG24-S0216**.

Institutional Review Board Statement

Not applicable.

Informed Consent Statement

Not applicable.

Data Availability Statement

The study data were collected from all participants.

Acknowledgements

The authors sincerely thank all the respondents for their valuable time and insights in completing the questionnaire, and extends gratitude to the anonymous reviewers for their thoughtful suggestions, which significantly enhanced the quality of this research.

Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare no conflict of interest. The funders had no role in the design of the study; in the collection, analyses, or interpretation of data; in the writing of the manuscript; or in the decision to publish the results.

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