

**Motivation, Expectations, and Exam Anxiety:
A Triangulation in the Foreign Literature Classroom in the Algerian
Context**

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Abstract:

Despite its popularity among language learners, English maintains to be a barrier in the literature classroom. Regardless of the teaching-learning environment, a high level of anxiety has been witnessed among students of foreign literature in the Algerian University. Two main factors, motivation and expectation, have a direct influence on anxiety and, hence, have been found to put an impact on the students' final exam grades. This paper will undertake a quantitative-qualitative study to check the influence of students' motivations and expectations, to verify to what extent it affects their anxiety toward the learning experience, and how it is reflected in their exam results.

Keywords: Anxiety; English as a Foreign Language; Expectations; Foreign Literature; Motivation

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1. INTRODUCTION

A lot has been said about difficulties faced in exams in the fields of sciences due to their dependence on exactness and accuracy or due to the maintenance that these fields are strictly objective and cognitively speaking more concentrated. We hear researchers debating difficulties of reasoning in mathematics (Bergqvist 2007), and of logical connection complexities, misconceptions, and conceptual difficulties in physics (Peters 1982). We also learn of multiple choice questions complexity in medicine and biology exams (Qui et al. 2018) and even in the field of psychology; where the environment prepares learners to overcome exam anxiety, the existence of exam itself nevertheless is as much stressing as it is for the exact sciences.

Little however has been said about exam anxiety among students of literature classes. Learners of foreign language in my classes are becoming more and more stressful about how to deal with the target language in general and how to overcome exam difficulties in the literature module in specific. Unlike the so-called exact sciences, literature is focally an interpretive field. Despite the standardization of the theories of critical analysis established for the purpose of finding accurate and more systematic approaches of reading literary texts, difficulties at the level of analysis and interpretation are still prevailing if not negatively impacting the learners' outcomes/inputs.

2. Difficulties in Foreign Literature Classroom

There are numerous reasons why difficulties in the foreign literature classroom prevail. One reason is that learners are not only struggling with foreign language structures but with the cultural and aesthetic indulgences, a literary text entails. As Rosenblatt (1977) argues, literature education entails "particular values, tastes, and mannerisms empowering particular responses and motivating particular sorts of reading viz. poetic, aesthetic readings" (qtd. In Nystrand 1990, p. 1).

The learners' previous background and experience in the literary arena is most of the time a limited one in the case of foreign language. Before entering university, students from different fields encounter excerpts from foreign language literary texts the fact that limits their knowledge about the literary tastes and values and mannerisms mentioned in Rosenblatt's quote above. Moreover, the problem encountered lies within authenticity of the literary text; retold stories are familiar examples.

Another aspect is the difficulty of the language itself. Each writer has his/her own linguistic background that is injected within the text and exposed in the form of Standard English. This makes learners confused as they are exposed to different Englishes instead of the standard form they expect to learn.

The linguistic gap between the learners' first language and the foreign language exposes them to other complexities. Algerian students in this case confront more obstacles because of French as second language. Although near to the foreign language, French is part of the linguistic identity of the Algerian student that has been learned simultaneously with the first language that makes it a reference to Western language and culture in general. When facing differences between the two languages, French and English, the learner finds it more complex to deal with the literary text and his/her referential background.

Grammar and vocabulary knowledge persist to be a barrier to the achievement of language proficiency. When encountered in the literary text, they show more difficulties as they are either violated in terms of writing or use or misspelled for literary purposes. Other aspects emphasized by Hassan (2018) include lack of knowledge of Western history and culture, which literature in particular demands; the student's cultural background, the length of the text, the text's relevance to the learner's life experiences; and the text's ability to stimulate the learners' involvement and interests.

All the above selected difficulties lie within the text itself that makes them exterior variables that can be managed through different strategies. The fact that makes the learning

process more difficult is a set of interior variables related to the learner's psychological and emotional state.

In his theories of language learning and acquisition, Stephen Krashen sketches five hypotheses to language function. Among these is the Affective Filter Hypothesis that discusses the relationship between affective variables, like self-confidence, anxiety, and motivation, in enhancing or degrading language acquisition. Taking his first hypothesis into consideration; the one that suggests that while language learning is conscious process language acquisition is an unconscious process and which maintains that the already mentioned variables are related to language acquisition rather than language learning, this study will look at the two variables, motivation and anxiety, within literature classroom at the English department of the University of Saida, third year level. These variables are said to be of eminent relationship with how performers with high/low motivation score and how high/low anxiety appears to be hindering/conducive to language acquisition at the individual and classroom level. The main objective will undertake one specific factor that relates both variables which is learners' expectations in exams and their impact on their scores. Before entering the methodological section, it is worth to sketch a review of literature on both variables and their connection to the emphasized factor.

3. Motivation and its Impact

Although a clear notion, motivation has been used as a concept to refer to multiple things that it has become difficult to get a consensus over its meaning. From their part, behaviorists argue that motivation determines and regulates human behavior and from this argument, questions arise to provide answers of how it works. Motivation moreover is a cognitive process, as Pintrich and Schunk argue, "Motivation is the process whereby goal-directed activity is instigated and sustained" (1996: 4). Motivation hence has static and dynamic conception where some intrinsic and extrinsic factors regulate its process.

In the Self-determination Theory towards motivation, theorists have distinguished between intrinsic and extrinsic motivation. While many argue that extrinsic motivation undermines the intrinsic one (learners losing motivation if they meet extrinsic difficulties), many others highlight through further research that extrinsic motivation has been an intriguing factor to language learning (most importantly external regulation type of motivation like a teacher's praise or a parent's confrontation, see Deci et Al. 1991).

While modern views deviate towards a non-motivational approach specifically toward language learning (for example Stephen Krashen (2015) who suggests that not all people are interested in language for its own and that motivation plays no role in language acquisition hence what suffices is how much compelling the message being delivered is) motivation still plays an eminent role in the teaching/learning process.

Motivation in language learning is strictly related to language nature itself and its multifaceted roles. Among these latter is what Dörnyei (1998) calls "communication coding system that can be taught as a school subject" (p.118) which relates directly the language function with its purpose within academic environment. Foreign language motivation in this matter involves the development of a sort of new identity and implications brought by the foreign language culture, among them those learned within literary texts.

In the scope of this view, it is important to refer to the Theory of Reasoned Action by Ajzan and Fishbein (1980) who suggest that an individual's actions are determined by his/her intention to perform a particular behavior. This intentional behavior functions on two basic factors: attitudes towards the behavior and subjective norm. This latter is of a strict relation to the subject matter of this paper. Subjective norm refers to an individual's perception of the social pressures that intrigue a given performance and behavior in him/her. These relate to the learners' social pressures (academic or parental) and their influence on his/her performance and behavior during the learning process (emphasis is on exams). Another component furthered by Ajzan (1988) is the "perceived behavioral control" which

refers to the easiness/difficulty of performing the behavior (for example in answering exam questions). Foreign literature learners not only are under pressures of the foreignism of the target language but also have to manage their performance and behavior towards the literature tasks they encounter during their academic journey.

According to the Expectancy-Value Theories, motivation is the product of two key factors: the learner's expectancy of success in a given task and the value s/he attaches to the task itself. Given the nature of the human being as knowledge seeker, it is not only what motivates the learner but also what directs his/her inherent motivation that matters. Another factor that negatively intervenes in the process is what Eccles et al. (1987) call as 'cost'. This latter refers to what is "lost, given up, or suffered as a consequence of engaging in a particular activity," that particularly, "affect the negative valence of the activity" (qtd. in Dörnyei, 1998, p.216). The learners expectancies before, during, and after exams motivate their performance while their engagement, if negatively experienced, motivates the whole learning process of a foreign language.

Taking into consideration all the motivational factors that interfere in learning language it is possible to summarize that while motivation implies a lot factors under its layers, the emotional factors are of no less importance than the cognitive ones. As Williams and Burdens (1997) conclude, "Motivation may be construed as a state of cognitive and emotional arousal, which leads to a conscious decision to act, and which gives rise to a period of sustained intellectual and/or physical effort in order to attain a previously set goal (or goals)" (p.120). This establishes a link to address how does the affective factors of foreign language learning, mainly anxiety, are eminent to success/failure in the field.

4. Anxiety

Anxiety first is a psychological state that is activated with internal and external factors. Hilgard, Atkinson and Atkinson (1971) argue that "Anxiety is a psychological construct,

commonly described by psychologists as a state of apprehension, a vague fear that is only indirectly associated with an object" (cited in Scovel, 1991, p.18).

Anxiety towards foreign language learning is referred to as xenoglossophobia, a word of a Latin origins composing of three Greek words: xeno meaning foreign, glosso meaning language, and phobia meaning excessive fear. In foreign language classroom, anxiety arises whenever learners face situations that are either unknown to them or those that they find difficult to grasp. Language anxiety hence "encompasses the feelings of worry and negative, fear-related emotions associated with learning or using a language that is not an individual's mother tongue" (MacIntyre & Gregersen, 2012, p.103). In his discussion of affective variables to language acquisition, Krashen (1982) maintains that anxiety is a barrier that prevents information to achieve the brain; the lower the affective filter is the better language acquisition prevails. It directly affects the acquirer's achievements and performance.

In their study of Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety, Horwitz Horwitz and Cope (1986) define language anxiety as "a distinct complex of self-perceptions, beliefs, feelings, and behaviors related to classroom language learning arising from the uniqueness of the language learning process" (p.128). They also argue that anxiety undermines the foreign language process. While many interpret their argument of FLCA as constituting three elements, Communication Apprehension, Fear of Negative Evaluation, and Test Anxiety, it is eminent to clarify that their argument was rather on how FLCA is different from those three constructs. Nevertheless, one constituent, Test Anxiety, is of preliminary importance to our discussion. As they argue, "Test-anxiety refers to a type of performance anxiety stemming from a fear of failure. Test-anxious students often put unrealistic demands on themselves and feel that anything less than a perfect test performance is a failure" (p. 127-128). Tests hence drive a type of anxiety in students that push them to strictly evaluate themselves than they are evaluated by the instructor. Any rate less than perfect is considered a failure for them, the impact of this anxiety actually has deeper and far-reaching consequences.

In their discussion of the causes of foreign language anxiety, Oteir & Al-Otaibi (2019) sketch a list of factors that psychologically influence foreign language learners' outcomes. They summarize Young's discussion of them into six categories: interpersonal and personal anxiety, learners' beliefs about learning a foreign language, classroom procedures, employing teacher-centered method, and language examination (p. 313). Although all are intermingled in the process, the last aspect is of great importance to this study. Students react to language test differently but some test formats in themselves arouse anxiety. Students actually experience anxiety even before entering test evaluation during the preparation of test material. Their state during preparation level influences their expectations. This may coincide with ambiguous or indirect questions. In this matter Young (1991) argues, "In language testing, the greater the degree of student evaluation and the more unfamiliar and ambiguous the test tasks and formats, the more the learner anxiety produced" (p.429). This leads us to the factor under scrutiny of this paper, expectations in exams, and its role on the learning process in third year level literature classroom. Before undertaking the study matter, let us have a look at literature as subject and the importance of exam expectations impact on learners' performance.

As stated at the beginning of this paper, literature entails particular values and requires particular responses to these values that motivate the tasting process of reading it. (Rosenblatt; 1977). Difficulties in reading and analyzing the foreign literature hence arise as consequence of this interaction. Difficulty here is not categorical, not all readers at all times face the same degree of difficulty but its presence is a fact in each classroom. Furthermore, although what makes learners fear the literary text is not always the difficulty of the syntax or the lexical characteristics of a text; sometimes it is the nature of interpretation that determines the difficulty of the text. As Touponce (1990) suggests, "...the theory of the text suggests that the idea of difficulty is less a property of texts themselves than of the ways in

which institutions train us to read" (p. 2). While language is in itself a barrier to the foreign language learner, difficulty in interpreting the literary text is inexorable.

Difficulty, hence, lies not only within the text but also in relation to and sometimes beyond the text. Interpreting Woolf's texts lies within the text as much as it does on the interferences she makes to her readers. Compared let us say Jane Austen or Emily Bronte, Woolf's stories are of a mystery. Orwell's *Animal Farm* is an easy story when read as a fairy tale but difficult when interpreted as an allegory.

Another factor is the interpretive questions provided to the reader in the learning process. Gall (1984) found that twenty percent of teachers' questions are procedural; sixty percent of them elicit recall, while only twenty require analysis. Another aspect is the teacher's personality. Many teachers ask questions and look for particular answers forgetting that the nature of the literature subject is analytical at the first place that calls for wider spaces of interpretation.

Students' engagement with the text is another factor. There are two basic ways in which students engage with the literary text: procedural and substantive. The former requires the learner's observance and rules regulations while the latter calls for a commitment to the context. Foreign Literature students have to deal with both structural characteristics the different literary genres display plus the foreign context in which the text had been produced.

Another aspect that intrigues students' high anxiety is evaluation, specifically in literature written exam. There is a list of factors that interfere in the process. This paper will concentrate of expectation in exams and their influence on the student's performance and anxiety level. Sweiry et al. (2002) argue that our experiences and the experiences of others influence our expectations. These are recorded in what scientists call the episodic memory (Conway et al. 1997) which becomes later the schema to similar events. In this matter, the schema becomes a predefined framework and guides future experiences (Bartlett 1932).

They hence become automatic and unconscious; if an unusual experience pops in it contradicts our schema. Students are said to develop a number of schemas when it comes to questions in exams. In literature, for example, their previous experiences shape their expectation even when the teacher is not the same. When faced with new styles of question, their schema is activated nevertheless. In this respect, many of them find themselves answering the expected questions rather than the ones they actually have in front of them. It is difficult for them to contradict their expectations.

Johnson-Laird (1981) introduced the term cognitive satisfiers referring to how as human beings we process meaning. When we construct meaning, we think it is compatible with a given word/sentence. Therefore, we do not search for alternatives. Our brains, moreover, process words sequentially. The first word we meet may trigger expectations of what will come after. In this sense, the first words in a question may mis/lead and dominate a student's reading of the question that will lead consequently to a given answer. The more familiar the scenario; the powerful our schema is. Schemas can be individual or collective. This is very apparent when students establish ties within the same classroom for a long time. As far as the situation in this classroom is concerned, the coming section will display a given type of schema that not only influence the learners' behavior but also their performances.

5. Purpose of the Study

Foreign language students differently express their emotions toward the target language. Anxiety is one type of suppressive feelings that learners show when periods of examination appear. Literature of the foreign language particularly has its own anxiety maybe which requires naming. Although learners express their positive reactions towards the reading, explanation, and analysis phases of dealing with the foreign language literary texts, the case is not the same when it comes to tests. The negativity of their feelings emerges as soon as the word test pops in. This makes the researcher question both their motivation and expectations of the subject under study. Therefore, this research paper aims to highlight

first, to what extent does the learners' motivation towards the foreign literature impact the outcomes of their examination. It, from another angle, put emphasis on the aspect of learners' exam expectation (s) and its role in manipulating those outcomes. It finally gathers both factors to study their influence of the arousal of anxiety before and after the exams.

6. Description of the Teaching and Learning Situation

This research is conducted at the Department of English Language and Literature, Faculty of Letters, Languages, and Arts at the University of MOULAY Tahar, Saida, Algeria. The students participating in this study are having literature as a subject during their licence degree for three years. Being the third year in this case means that they have already dealt with literature for four semesters in the previous years. During this period they meet a syllabus that emphasizes study of literary genres and literary movements and which aims at continuation. In other words, when coming to the end of the second year, they should have at least grasped both knowledge of the type of the literary text they are dealing with, ability to classify it, and familiarity with the context (meaning historical, economic, political, religious, and philosophical characteristics of the movements under study). At the beginning of the third year, they meet a new literary movement called Modernism. Despite their experience of two years in the field of foreign literature, the researcher expects it to be a difficult and rather a disturbing experience. It is the actual situation even for scholars who deal with modernism let alone foreign literature learners. Students not only built a schema of studying literature but also that of exam question, which most of the time was dealing with elements of literature with an emphasis on themes of the given text and period. Being a complex philosophical movement with eclectic theories requires new methods of reading and analyzing the literature of the target movement. This, thus, puts an emotional impact even before exam period.

6.1. Research Design

While carrying out the research, the researcher found it difficult to decide whether to carry on an experimental or a theoretical scheme in assessing anxiety since the purpose of this research demands both. The paper finally pursued an experimental study in which pre-exam and post-exam questionnaires were submitted to assess the students' motivation (s), expectation (s), and the impact of these latter on the students' level of anxiety in relation to exams.

6.2. Research Participants

Among 124 students enrolled in third year, 70 students participated voluntarily in the study; 46 of them females and 24 males (Gender Percentage filled 65,7 % and 34,5% successively). In preparation of a Mental Health Awareness Day that will take place at the level of the faculty four months ahead, the researcher explained the importance of knowing the difficulties the students meet during examination, particularly within the literature exams. Prior to the exam date, the researcher sent the participants a pre-questionnaire that targeted the students' motivation toward studying literature, the preparation process they pursuit, their expectation for the exam question (s), and whether they feel anxious about the process. They were finally asked to guess the source of their anxiety, if any exists. The day of the TD exam, knowing well that this type of exam is less stressing then the final exam at the end of the semester where students are well aware that it will decide their success/failure in the end, students were given the post-questionnaire that addressed almost the same criteria, motivation, expectation, and source of anxiety.

6.3. Data Collection Instruments

As the research problem investigates students' motivation, expectations, and their role in increasing/decreasing their exam outcomes; the process makes motivation and expectations the independent variable that influences the dependent variables "students" and "exam results". Since the research falls in the field of teaching and learning literature in a foreign language classroom, it correspondently brings the importance of not only how to

assess the students' knowledge but finding ways to minimize what hinders their output. Accordingly, the systematic collection of data focused on two dimensions: learners' initial psychological states and their influence on the exam-day procedures. A pre-test and post-test were suitable tools for the process. Hence, the experiment manipulation took almost two weeks period. The pretest was sent to the students two weeks before the exams and the post-test was collected the day of the exam.

6.4. Data Analysis

Before one proceeds with the data analysis it is eminent to refer to the importance of tests as "valuable measuring instruments...a set of stimuli presented to an individual in order to elicit responses on the basis of which a numerical score can be assigned" (Ary et al., 2010, p. 201). In this respect, two tests were directed to the students, a pre-test and a post-test, which contents will be developed in the coming section. It is worth noting that questions fit into three categories: close-ended questions, open-ended questions, and both. The aim behind the selection of alternative means to answer the question is to elicit information that help both qualitative and quantitative analysis of the results.

7. Analysis and Interpretation

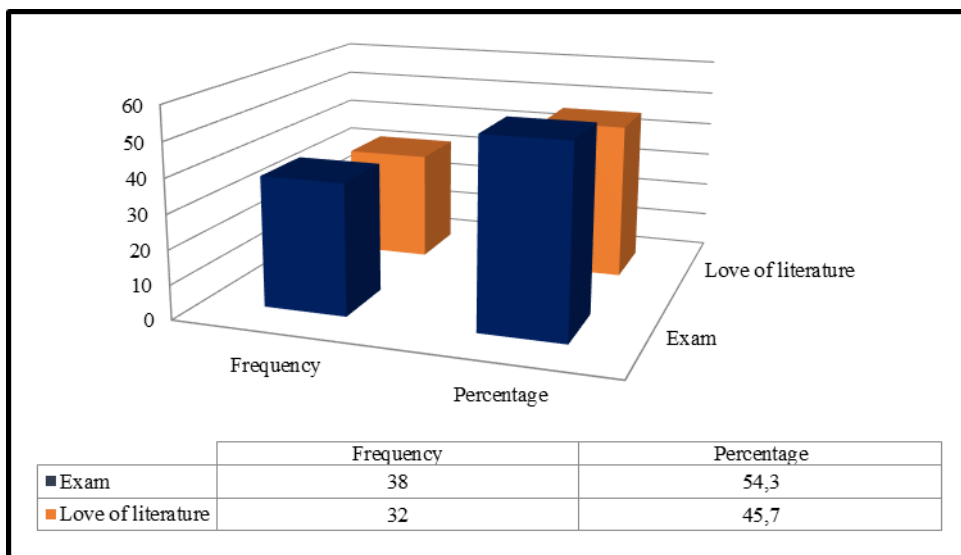
As it has been previously stated, the questionnaires were designed to assess the students' affective factors, mainly motivation and expectations, and their impact on the students' performance and hence students' results in foreign literature exams.

7.1. Analysis of the Motivation Factor

As the figure below shows, 38 participants stated that their aim behind studying literature has been the exam, which is higher than the number of students who expressed that the love of literature makes them more motivated to study the course despite its difficulty (n=32). The researcher is being aware that students have no choice for taking/not taking the course, yet, their motivations exceed the choice factor.

Fig. 1: Motivation behind Study of Literature

Context



It is worth noting that questions in the pre-test and the post-test have been intertwined respectively from 1 to 5 so they serve the purpose of analyzing the impact of the pre-experience on the post-experience. As the figure below exposes, motivation has an impact on the students' outcomes. Although students' views differed in terms of their motivation; yet the majority of them (n=61), combining those who preferred exam and those expressed love toward literature, agreed that their motivation had positive/negative impact on their results. It is worth noting that motivation impact stated in the results was higher for the students whose motivation was targeting exam grades. This corresponds to Ajzan and Fishbein (1980) views about motivation and its importance explained previously in this article.

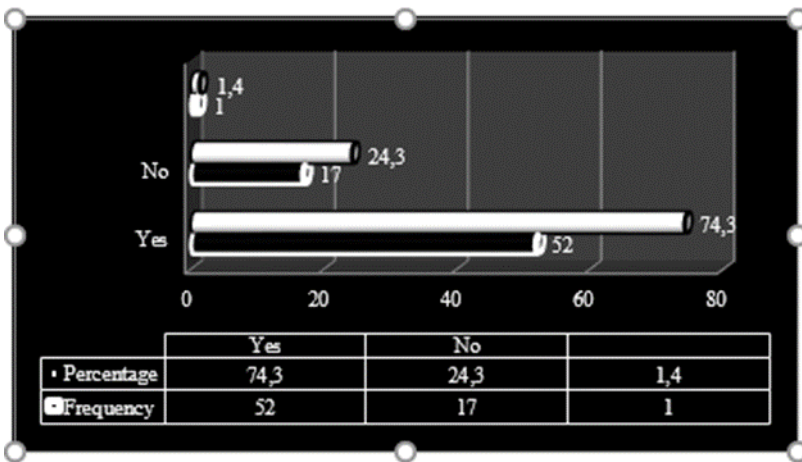
Fig. 2: Motivation Impact on the Students' Results

		<u>Motivation's impact on results</u>	
		<u>Yes</u>	<u>No</u>
<u>Motivation for studying literature</u>	<u>Exam</u>	55	5
	<u>Love of literature</u>	28	4
Total		61	9

7.2. Analysis of the Expectation Factor

Before entering the expectation zone, the researcher paved the way by assessing the students' opinions about their preparation procedures and its effect on their success/failure. Out of the 70 participants, 41 (58,6%) of them revealed that they prepared well while 29 (41,4%) of them expressed a lack of preparation (check question 2 in the pre-test and post-test) . On the impact of the preparation process on their results, 50 students revealed that what they prepared guided their answers and hence the results; while 20 of them denied any relation between the two. This step facilitated the researcher's road towards expectations as factor. As the figure below reveals, one of the participants abstained from answering while 3/4 (74,3%) of them validated the existence of some governing expectations and 1/4 (24,3%) preferred not to expect until the day of the exam.

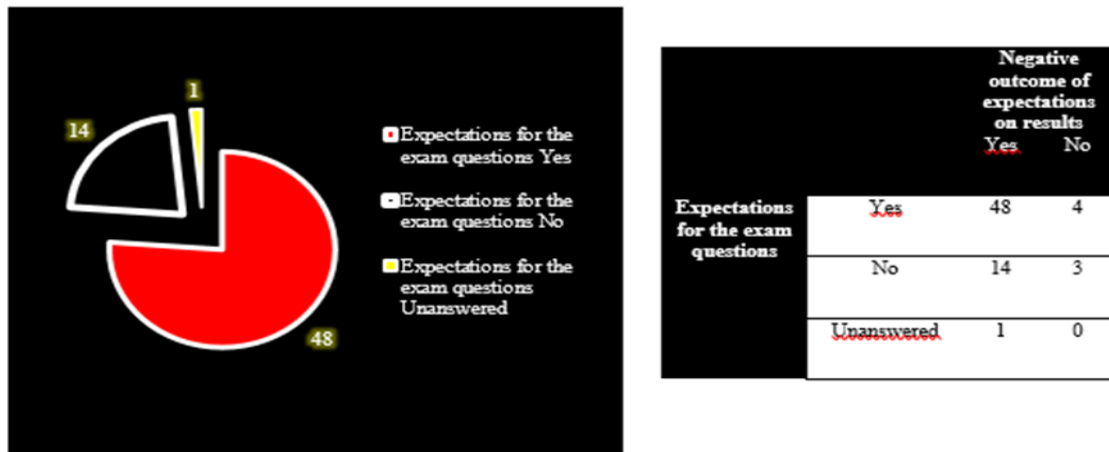
Fig. 3. Expectations for Exam Questions



Although a vast number of students revealed that they already expected a set of exam questions, hence the fact that could have been a helpful aspect, students' expectation had a negative impact on the process of answering the faced questions: (92%) of the students who had formed expectations towards certain questions, revealed that those expectations affected the outcome of their test negatively (see results in figure 4 below). The problem may generate because of cognitive satisfiers as Johnson-Laird (1981) suggested or the students' prior experience with exams in the field as Sweiry et al. (2002) argued, or simply that their expectations blocked them from a good process of the content of the questions. This leads us

directly to how anxiety is a component of the blocking aspect discussed in the latter suggestion.

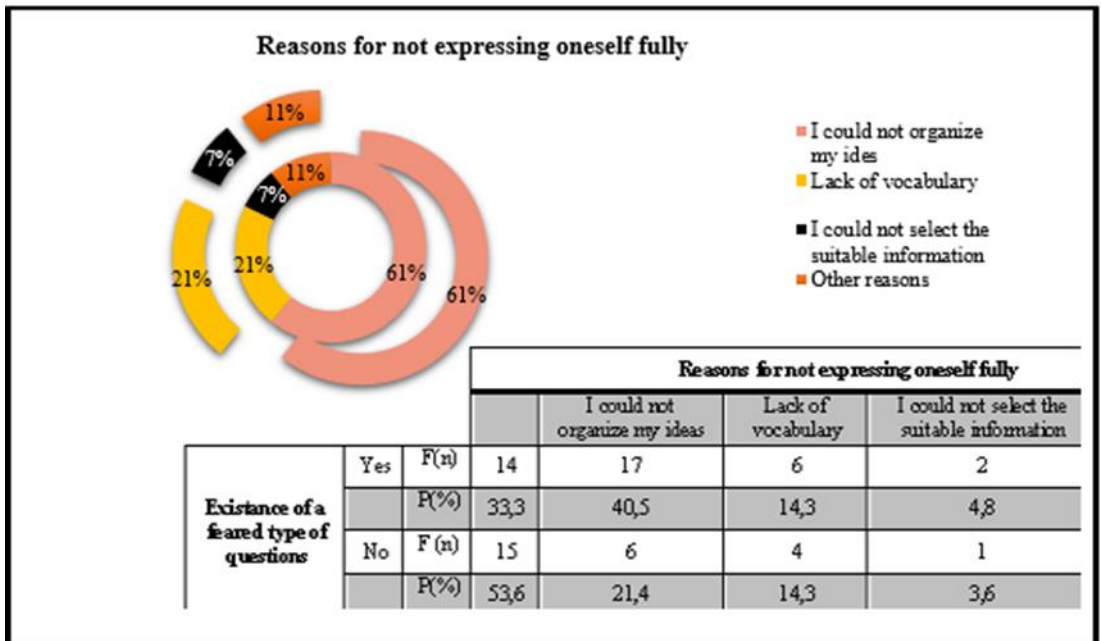
Fig.4. Negative Outcome of Expectations on the Exam Results



It is in the process of witnessing the students’ answers that the researcher could deduce the correlation between the anxiety factor and the students’ results. When asked about the type of questions they find most difficult 34,3% agreed that it is the analytical questions that make them frustrated, 18,6% feared indirect questions while 4,3% directed their fear to simple and direct question, although this latter type also implies analytical thinking as the literary concepts are never free from critical thinking. Intertwined with their reflect on their results, students expressed their failure to respond either because of expectations (I did not revise for the right topic 45,7%) or to their inability to remember because of exam stress (38,6%).

Figure 5 below summarizes the study objective to find a correlation between anxiety and the students’ ability to express their thoughts during exams. The results show that 40,5% of the students who confirmed having feared a certain type of question stated that they could not express themselves fully due to not being able to organize their ideas,;14,3% of them suffered while answering due to their lack of vocabulary, 4,8% could not select the suitable information to answer and 7,1% attributed their inability to express themselves freely to other reasons.

Fig. 5: Reasons behind Students’ Inability to Answer Exam Questions



To sum up, it is important for the sake of the success of the teaching-learning experience to take into consideration many factors that influence the desired results. Among these are; students' motivation and expectations, their prior experience with exam questions in the field, and the affective aspects that either increase/decrease their performances.

8. Conclusion

Teaching a foreign language has become a challenging task in times of higher rates of anxiety, especially among young adult learners. Learning the foreign language literature is even more stressful and difficult to pass during period of exams. To facilitate the task, the researcher summarizes a few recommendations for colleagues in the field in general and for further researches:

- 1- Students' actions are determined by their intentional behavior, most specifically their awareness of the social pressure; in this case the teacher's behavior, and the way s/he influences theirs. In this respect, the students' behavior is a projection of his/hers.
- 2- Expectation is a human condition. It is nurtured by experience and consequently develops to become schemas. As literary teachers, it is better to build these schemas daily in series of readings, conversations composed of questions and answers, and writing analytical

sentences, paragraphs, then essays. The earlier we built these schemas, the beneficial the outcomes. If previously nurtured, the exam day becomes just another day.

3- Students' anxiety towards the literature of the foreign language is already a component of the learning experience. The teacher's job is to find within the literary text aspects that attract the modern learners' attention and tempt them to interact with the text without even being aware of it. A psychological problem requires psychological measures.

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