Professional Future Anxiety Among University Students- A Comparative Study of Graduating Psychology and English Majors at the University of Djelfa

قلق المستقبل المهني لدى طلبة الجامعة- دراسة مقارنة بين الطلبة المقبلين على التخرج في تخصصي علم النفس والإنجليزية بجامعة الجلفة

Hocine GHRIEB* | **Chaima ZROG** | **Souaad ZIANI**

Professor, Universityof Djelfa | **University of Djelfa** | **University of Djelfa**

h.ghrieb@univ-djelfa.dz | **ch.zrog2025@gmail.com** | **s.ziani2025@gmail.com**

Received:30/09/2025 | **Accepted :24/05/2026** | **Published: 02/06/2026**

- **Abstract :Our** study aims to investigate the differences in the professional future anxiety variable among prospective graduating students majoring in psychology and English, as well as the differences between males and females. The descriptive method (differential studies) was applied to detect variations in professional future anxiety between the groups, namely the psychology student group and the English language student group. The study sample consisted of (95)male and female students from both majors, selected using a simple random sampling method. Furthermore, we measured the variable using the Professional Future Anxiety Scale by (Solaf Mechri et al., 2018). To verify the validity of the study hypotheses, the data were statistically processed using SPSS (Version 22), fielding the following results:

-No differences in professional future anxiety between prospective graduating students in psychology and English majors.

-No differences in professional future anxiety between males and females within the psychology major.

-No differences in professional future anxiety between males and females within the English language major.

This study highlighted "professional future anxiety" as an influential reality in the lives of graduating students standing on the threshold of a new and pivotal phase in their academic and professional career. These students suffer from dual anxiety, torn between ambition and apprehension, which reflects the magnitude of the challenges they face in transitioning from the academic environment to the labor market.

- **Keywords**: Professional Future Anxiety, university students, academic major.

- **الملخص:** نهدف في مقالنا إلى دراسة الفروق في متغير قلق المستقبل المهني بين الطلبة المقبلين على التخرج في تخصصي علم النفس واللغة الإنجليزية وكذلك الفروق بين الذكور والإناث، فقد تم تطبيق المنهج الوصفي (الدراسات الفرقية) من أجل كشف الفروق في قلق المستقبل المهني بين المجموعات، وهما مجموعة طلبة تخصص علم النفس ومجموعة طلبة اللغة الإنجليزية، وقد قدرت عينة الدراسة بـ (95 طالب

*-Corresponding author

وطالبة) من كلا التخصصين حيث اختيارهم بطريقة عشوائية بسيطة، كما قمنا بقياس المتغير باستخدام مقياس قلق المستقبل المهني ل الباحثة (سلاف مشري و آخرون، 2018)، وللتحقق من صحة فرضيات الدراسة تمت معالجة البيانات إحصائيا باستخدام (SPSS) (22- وفي الأخير تم التوصل إلى النتائج التالية:

- لا توجد فروق في قلق المستقبل المهني بين الطلبة المقبلين على التخرج في تخصصي علم النفس واللغة الإنجليزية.
- لا توجد فروق في قلق المستقبل المهني بين الذكور والإناث في تخصص علم النفس.
- لا توجد فروق في قلق المستقبل المهني بين الذكور والإناث في تخصص اللغة الإنجليزية.

أبرزت هذه الدراسة مفهوم قلق المستقبل المهني كواقع مؤثر في حياة الطلاب الخريجين الذين يقفون على أعتاب مرحلة جديدة ومحورية في مسيرتهم الأكاديمية والمهنية، حيث يعاني هؤلاء الطلاب من قلق مزدوج ممزقين بين الطموح والتوجس وهو ما يعكس حجم التحديات التي يواجهونها في الانتقال من البيئة الأكاديمية إلى سوق العمل.

- **الكلمات مفتاحية**: قلق المستقبل المهني، طلبة الجامعة، التخصص.

1. Research Problem:

The university stage is among the most critical educational phases in an individual's life, distinct from pre-university education. This vital period aims to develop students' academic and personal skills, serving as a launchpad for professional and personal goals. Despite its importance, students face challenges including academic pressures, difficulties adapting to university life, and struggles balancing academic/personal responsibilities—particularly graduating seniors who encounter:

- Uncertainty about suitable career paths
- Transition from academia to professional life
- Competitive job market pressures
- Securing field-appropriate employment

These uncertainties often leave graduates unemployed, triggering tension and anxiety about their professional future (Professional Future Anxiety, PFA).

PFA has emerged as a prominent psychological issue in contemporary societies. Anxiety about future uncertainties (employment, health, relationships) impacts mental health, with university students being particularly vulnerable. Such stressors provoke anxiety stemming from fear of the unknown future, ultimately compromising Quality of Life (QoL)—defined as enjoying a fulfilling, dignified existence free from diseases and disorders.

Mohamed Lakmash (2022) confirmed this relationship in his study of PFA and QoL among university students, demonstrating that higher PFA correlates with lower QoL, and conversely, students with higher QoL exhibit lower PFA (Lakmash, 2022).

Conversely, Abdellah Menad's (2022) research on PFA and academic ambition among social science students revealed no significant relationship between PFA levels and academic ambition, indicating neither variable influences the other (Menad, 2022).

It is observed that final-year university students express future-oriented anxiety due to concerns about:

- Post-graduation career decisions
- Employment prospects
- Duration of job searches
- Potential misalignment between their field and future work

This state of tension, fear, and confusion regarding professional unknowns constitutes {Professional Future Anxiety (PFA)}.

Sara Bekkar (2013) established in her study of thinking patterns and PFA that:

"Students' thinking patterns significantly influence PFA levels: positive thinking reduces PFA, while negative thinking exacerbates it" (Bekkar, 2013).

Hisham Mokheimer (2013) indicated in his research on PFA and academic achievement motivation:

"Elevated PFA impairs students' academic motivation—diminishing aspirations for excellence, perseverance, and effort. This stems from negative career outlooks, employment pessimism, and anticipated income/social status losses" (Mokheimer, 2013, pp. 523-528).

Critical finding: Humanities students exhibit significantly higher PFA than science majors due to:

- Greater market demand for STEM graduates.
- Limited humanities employment opportunities.

Amal Ghanayem (2018) posits that PFA impacts university students' academic performance, achievement, and study efficacy. Consequently, affected students exhibit:

"Diminished desire for excellence/distinction and no effort to overcome academic obstacles hindering outstanding performance."

She indicates that increased satisfaction with one's major reduces PFA, while decreased satisfaction elevates PFA. This was evidenced in her study of PFA and major satisfaction as predictors of academic achievement among special education students (Ghanayem, M., 2018).

Debbagh & Al-Khair (2020) concluded in their study on PFA and mental health:

"No significant relationship exists between PFA and mental health among university students."

They attributed this to:

"Students contemplating their professional future within reasonable limits without psychological harm."

Additionally, the study found:

"No PFA differences between scientific and humanities disciplines."

Proposed explanations include: Sample characteristics, Shared age demographics, Comparable satisfaction levels across majors, Unified goal of obtaining graduation certification, High graduation rates in both fields (Debbagh, Y. & Al-Khair, Z., 2020).

Iman El-Sayed (2021) identified a statistically significant inverse relationship between social responsibility and PFA dimensions:

She explains this through:

"University students' social responsibility fuels anxiety about future failure, imposing immense pressure and career anxiety."

Furthermore: "Evolving qualification requirements for public/private sector jobs cause mental exhaustion and chronic anxiety to secure ambition-fulfilling positions."

Crucially: "Students aspire to identity-affirming careers ensuring materially/morally dignified lives. The aspiration-reality gap generates substantial professional anxiety" (El-Sayed, I., 2021).

Through firsthand observation of university realities, we note pervasive fear, confusion, and pessimistic career outlooks- particularly among graduating students. We therefore propose examining PFA differences between third-year Psychology and English majors through the following questions:

1. Are there differences in Professional Future Anxiety (PFA) between Psychology and English Language majors?
2. Is there gender-based PFA differences among Psychology majors?
3. Is there gender-based PFA differences among English Language majors?

2. **Hypotheses:**

1. There exist differences in PFA between Psychology and English Language majors.
2. There exists gender-based PFA differences among Psychology majors.
3. There exists gender-based PFA differences among English Language majors.

3. Theoretical/Operational Definition of PFA:

3-1- Theoretical Definition:

- Abd El-Tawab (2007): "PFA is career-specific anxiety involving tension and pessimism due to scarce post-graduation job opportunities."
- Al-Safasfa & Al-Mahameed (2007): "PFA is a state of discomfort, tension, distress, and fear about an uncertain professional future and securing suitable employment."
  (Mashri, 2018, p. 277)
- Al-Ajmi: "PFA is targeted anxiety where individuals perceive its causes, accompanied by fear/doubt about personal/impersonal changes, stemming from hopelessness and lack of control." (Ibid., p. 277)

3-2-Operational Definition:

"An emotional psychological state experienced by students due to tension/fear about post-graduation career opportunities. It is measured by scores on the Professional Future Anxiety Scale (Mashri, Fellah, & Jawadi, 2018) among third-year Psychology and English majors nearing graduation at Ziane Achour University, Djelfa."

4. Methodology:

Design: Descriptive approach, defined as:

"A method for data collection that examines variables in their natural state without experimentation."

We applied a comparative study subtype, which: "Focuses on measuring differences between two or more groups in a specific variable to confirm the independent variable's causal role." (Ghrieb, H., 2016).

This design was used to measure PFA differences between Psychology/English majors and across genders.

5. Study Sample:

Total: 95 third-year students (Bachelor's level) from Ziane Achour University, Djelfa, selected via simple random sampling:

- Psychology : 60 students
- English Language: 35 students

Table 1 : Sample Distribution by Major

Academic Major	Number of Students	Percentage
Psychology	60	63%
English Language	35	37%

Table 2: Psychology Students by Gender

Gender	Number of Students	Percentage
Male	20	33%
Female	40	67%

Table 3: English Students by Gender

Gender	Number of Students	Percentage
Male	12	34%
Female	23	66%

6. Study Instrument:

The Professional Future Anxiety Scale (PFAS) developed by Mashri, Fellah, and Jawadi (2018) was utilized. The scale comprises 35 items across three dimensions :

- Negative/ Pessimistic Career Thinking
- Psychological Manifestations of PFA
- Physical Manifestations of PFA.

The instrument demonstrates acceptable validity (internal consistency, extreme group comparisons) and reliability (split-half method, Cronbach's α = .89). Its psychometric properties confirm suitability for measuring PFA among third-year university students.

7. Statistical Techniques:

Data were analyzed using SPSS-22 with:

- Independent samples *t*-tests (group differences)
- Arithmetic means (M).
- Standard deviations (SD).
- Frequency distributions.

8. Results & Analysis:

-Hypothesis 1: PFA Differences Between Majors

Table 4: Independent *t*-test by Major

Major	*n*	M (PFA)	SD	*t*	*p*
Psychology	60	21.04	20.17	-0.021	.216
English Language	35	23.25	22.31		

-Result: No significant difference (*p* > .05). Hypothesis rejected.

Interpretation: Limited job availability across disciplines (including foreign languages) and detachment from degree-linked careers may explain homogeneity. Rising unemployment benefits also reduce anxiety. Aligns with Ouchen (2020) and Mohamed (2023); contradicts Tabchi (2024).

-Hypothesis 2: Gender Differences (Psychology)

Table 5: Independent *t*-test (Psychology)

Gender	*n*	M (PFA)	SD	*t*	*p*
Male	20	20.17	24.74	-1.14	.422
Female	40	21.37	22.31		

-Result: No significant difference (*p* > .05). Hypothesis rejected.

Interpretation: Equal valuation of higher education/work equalizes PFA. Males often enlist in the National People's Army (degree-dependent ranks), while females pursue entrepreneurship (e.g., tailoring, hairdressing).

-Hypothesis 3: Gender Differences (English)

Table 6: Independent *t*-test (English)

Gender	*n*	M (PFA)	SD	*t*	*p*
Male	12	24.74	20.17	1.13	.387
Female	23	22.31	21.37		

-Result: No significant difference (*p* > .05). Hypothesis rejected.

Interpretation: Shared pressures (graduation requirements, master's degree plans) and job-market challenges (limited experience, competition) homogenize PFA.

9. Conclusion

This study has highlighted Professional Future Anxiety (PFA) as an influential reality in the lives of graduating students standing on the threshold of a pivotal new phase in their academic and professional journeys. These students experience dual anxiety—torn between ambition and apprehension- reflecting the magnitude of challenges faced in transitioning from academia to employment.

The current research aimed to uncover PFA differences among third-year male and female students across two distinct majors (Psychology and English Language).

Despite initial expectations of variations in PFA levels between genders and disciplines, results indicate:

No statistically significant differences in PFA attributable to either major or gender.

This outcome does not signify an absence of anxiety among students but rather suggests homogeneity in PFA levels across groups. This homogeneity stems from universal pressures, challenges, and uncertainties associated with labor market entry-experienced by all students regardless of gender or academic background.

10. Recommendations:

1. Develop Early Career Guidance Programs
2. Integrate Labor Market Skills into Curricula
3. Transform Unemployment Benefits into Startup Incubators
4. Promote Cross-Disciplinary Skill Acquisition
5. Provide Digital Mental Health Support

References:

1. Al-Khair, Z., & Debbagh, Y. (2020). [Professional future anxiety and mental health] [Unpublished master's thesis]. Ahmed Draia University.
2. Bekkar, S. (2013). [Thinking patterns and professional future anxiety] [Unpublished master's thesis]. Abou Bekr Belkaid University.
3. Bouazza, A. A., & Tabchi, K. (2023). [Professional future anxiety and mental health] [Master's thesis]. Kasdi Merbah University.
4. El-Sayed, I. (2021). Responsibility and professional future anxiety among university youth. Journal of Future Sciences, *7*.
5. Ghanayem, A. M. (2018). Professional future anxiety and academic satisfaction as predictors of achievement. Journal of Special Education, *6*(22), 183–230.
6. Ghrieb, H. (2016). [Methodology in psychosocial studies]. Al-Doha Publishing.
7. Lakmash, M. (2022). [Future anxiety and quality of life] [Doctoral dissertation]. Abou Bekr Belkaid University.
8. Mashri, S., Fellah, K., & Jawadi, W. (2018). Professional Future Anxiety Scale. Journal of Social Sciences, *273*(1), 1–13.
9. Menad, A. (2022). [Future anxiety and academic ambition] [Unpublished master's thesis]. Ahmed Draia University.
10. Mokheimer, H. M. (2013). Professional future anxiety and academic achievement motivation. Egyptian Journal of Psychological Studies, *23*(79), 498–554.
11. Ouchen, N., & Ben Felis, K. (2020). University guidance and professional future anxiety. Journal of Humanities, *13*(1), 11–33.