Foreign Language Anxiety and Teacher Practices in EFL Classes

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ABSTRACT

This research investigates foreign language anxiety among Omani undergraduates. It also examines the gender-based differences between EFL learners with regard foreign language anxiety and explores the relation between language teachers' practices and FLA. Mixed-method design was employed using two instruments i.e., questionnaire and teachers' reports. The FLCAS was adapted and translated into Arabic to indicate the level of foreign language anxiety of the participants who were first year Omani students enrolled to Advanced-Level classes. Using SPSS, the questionnaire data were analyzed to investigate any gender-based differences related to FLA. Many studies dealt with FLA considered the practices of the teacher as one source of anxiety in language classes, thus the techniques and procedures the teachers of the sample employ to handle with anxiety-increasing settings were explored through the analysis of teachers' reflections regarding the strategies they use to correct students' errors, deal with silence in class, assign turns and provide comprehensible input. Overall, there were no significant gender-based differences revealed. Moreover, some practices of the teachers were considered contributing to fear of negative evaluation the participants experienced in class. The study offers a number of effective anxiety-reducing strategies for the EFL teachers at Omani universities.

KEYWORDS: *EFL, Foreign Language Anxiety, Oman*

INTRODUCTION

The learners' affective aspect has showed a great influence on the learners' participation and learning progress. Foreign language anxiety is among the key affective factors that would lead to an uncomfortable language learning experience in formal and informal situations (Oxford 1999). Students who are highly anxious face difficulties to get involved in activities taking place in the classroom. Furthermore, studies on foreign language anxiety revealed that it can negatively affect their academic achievement (Horwitz et al., 1986)as well as the cognitive processes to the degree that they might not be able to produce the target language(MacIntyre& Gardner, 1994). Many studies investigated foreign language anxiety among Asian students took place in context of Chinese and Korean universities. Despite the similarities, the context of this study is different. Although male and female students were segregated at public schools in Oman, almost all the higher education institutions in Oman are co-educational institution. This is expected to create feelings and beliefs which are different than those experienced by other learners in other parts of Asia. Besides, as English EFL learners get less opportunity to hear and speak English in their daily communication (Baker &MacIntyre, 2000).The findings of this study would help to fill the gap by investigating the issue of anxiety in EFL classes at in Omani context. It also examines gender- based differences in relation to foreign language anxiety among Omani undergraduates. Thus, mixed-method approach was employed to indicate the general level of FLCA and its relation, if any, with the teaching methods and techniques adopted by the EFL teachers. The findings would draw teachers' attention to the role that their teaching

strategies play in increasing the level of anxiety among their EFL students in the classroom.

Literature Review

The issue of anxiety the learners experience in foreign language classes was first investigated and discussed in a study by Horwitz et al. (1986) Horwitz and Cope (1986) in which they employed the Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (FLCAS). Horwitz et al (1986)referred to Foreign Language Anxiety(FLA) as "distinct complex of self-perceptions, beliefs, feelings, and behaviors related to classroom language learning a rising from the uniqueness of the language learning process"(p.128).Their study revealed that students encountered a significant amount of anxiety in their language class. Studies conducted afterwards using FLCAS supported their results. Horwitz et al (1986) identified three components of FLA: communication apprehension, fear of negative evaluation, and test anxiety.

Communication apprehension is the uncomfortable feeling which a learner sometimes experiences while expressing their thoughts while trying to understand other people around them.Such feelings stem from the learners' awareness that they cannot reach a complete, mature communication because their language knowledge is limited (Williams & Andrade, 2008).Furthermore, the insecurity that stems from errors can be a source of anxiety. Students would avoid communicating and participating in speaking activities in-class as they feel that if they speak in class, they might make some errors which in turn lead to the negative evaluation from the people around them. Therefore, they avoid getting involved in the tasks in the classroom.

Third, Test anxiety, according to Horwitz et. al (1986), is the kind of anxiety produced by the fears of failure. For anxious learners, oral assessment can generate both types of anxiety: test anxiety and oral communication anxiety (Horwitz et al. 1986). Anxiety has a negative impact foreign language acquisition and production (Horwitz et al., 1986; MacIntyre& Gardner 1991).High level of anxiety conflicts with second language acquisition theory introduced by Krashen (1985) since it affects one of the internal processes which is the affective filter. High level of anxiety might hinder the development of forging language proficiency as the received input will not reach the language acquisition devices of the learner (Krashen, 1985)**.**

Teachers' strategies have a great impact on the level of anxiety the students might experience in the classroom (Khan & Al-Mahrooqi, 2015). According to Khan & Al-Mahrooqi (2015), the curriculum should include literature, films and festivals to expose students to English culture. Additionally, this could be accomplished by utilizing the internet to encourage students to engage in independent and classroom-based speaking practice.

Methodology

The mixed-method approach was employed in this study to answer the main research questions which are:

1. Do the Omani undergraduate students experience foreign language anxiety in the classroom?

2. Are there any gender-based differences among the participants regarding to anxiety?

3. Is there any relation between the teachers' methodology and teaching strategies and the level of anxiety?

In this study, two data collection instruments were implemented. Firstly, the Foreign Language Communication Anxiety Scale (FLCAS) by Horwitz et al. (1986) was used to indicate the general level of anxiety among the participants who were a group of Omani undergraduate students attending the English language classes in the university. The teachers' reports were collected afterwards and analyzed in order to find strategies that are more effective when dealing with highly anxious students in foreign language classes. The number of EFL students who completed the questionnaire was thirty- two (males:16; females: 16). The participants were informed that their personal data and their responses would be treated confidentially and that their participation in this study would have no effect on their grades. None of the participants have been to a country where English is used either as a mother tongue or as a first language, so gender is considered the only independent variable in this study.

FLCAS

FLCAS by Horwitz et al.'s (1986) can accurately measure the level of anxiety of the learner experience at different times in the foreign language classroom (Aida, 1994). The FLCAS has been commonly used to measure the general level of anxiety experienced in language classrooms and was found "highly reliable" (Aida 1994p. 163). It contains 33 statements which examine: communication apprehension, fear of negative evaluation, and test anxiety in addition to general statement to indicate the Foreign Language Anxiety (Na, 2007). It is a five-point Likert Scale which range from "strongly agree" to "strongly disagree". The scale was tested and found reliable. Using SPSS, the data from the FLCAS were analyzed and a descriptive analysis was run to get means and standard deviations. The scale items were put under four headings: communication apprehension, test anxiety, fear of negative evaluation, and foreign language anxiety (Na, 2007)

Teachers' ReportsHO1

Using self-reports is considered an appropriate way that offer an indication of anxiety EFL learners experience in class. The appropriateness of using self-report measures to measure affective variables such as anxiety, is emphasized by (McCroskey & McCroskey, 1988)

Self-reports measures, then, are most appropriate when they are directed toward matters of affect and/or perception in circumstances in which the respondent has no reason to fear negative consequences from any answer given (p. 196).

Teachers of the sample group (n=5) were asked to reflect on the strategies they follow to deal with certain situations they encounter while teaching English to the participants. The purpose was to find whether their strategies contribute to the level of foreign language anxiety. Next, the teachers' reports were analyzed, and the qualitative data were categorized under four themes: error correction, silence in class, simplifying explanations and questions and allocating turns as were previously reported by Tsui (1996) who also reported that the analysis of such reports help to identify the techniques which lead to reduce learners' anxiety and distinguish those which increase the level of anxiety in the classroom. Furthermore, the data generated from the reports could be used to support the results of the FLCAS and to find relations between general FLA and teachers' techniques and their teaching methodology. The reports kept anonymous, and the teachers were numbered from 1 to 5.

Findings

A descriptive analysis was applied on the data collected from the FLCAS. It was found that 44% of the participants "feel more tense and nervous in the language classes than in other classes". This indicates that language learning is a task that generates feelings of anxiety for the students. Moreover, 53% of the participants reported that they start to panic when they have to speak in the classroom, whereas 34% agreed that they feel "*frightened*" if they can't understand what the teachers says in their English language classroom. Besides, the analysis revealed that 69% of the participants agreed with the item "*I feel overwhelmed by the number of rules you have to learn to speak English*".

Table 1 shows the reliability test of the four factors. Cronbach's alpha for test anxiety was .805, whereas for foreign language anxiety scale, Cronbach's alpha was 0.317.

PERSONAL PROFILE OF THE PG SCHOOL TEACHERS

Table 1: Gender of the PG School Teachers

S.no	Gender Group	Frequency	Percent
1.	Male	313	46.0
2.	Female	367	54.0
	Total	680	100.0

Table 1 shows gender profile of the PG school teachers, 54% of the them are male (367) and 46% of the PG school teachers are female (313). Hence, sizable numbers of gender groups are female teachers.
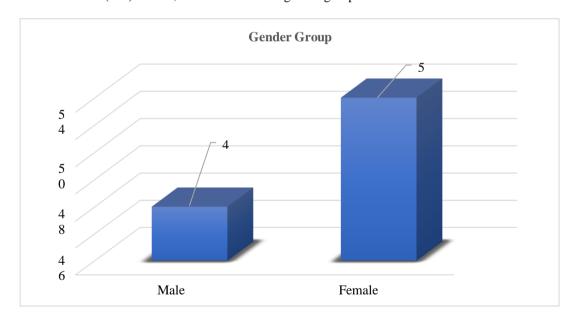

Figure 1: Gender of the Teachers.

Table 2: Subjects Taken by PG school teachers

S.no	Subjects Taken by PG school teachers	Frequency	Percent
1.	Language Teacher	147	21.6
2.	Science Teacher	369	54.3
3.	Humanities Teacher	142	20.9
4.	Vocational/Physical Education	22	3.2

Total	680	100.0

Table 2 shows subject taken by PG school teachers, 54.3% of the PG teachers are teaching science subject (369) followed by 21.6% of teachers are teaching language subjects (147), 20.9% of the teachers are taking humanities subject(142) and rest 3.2% of the teacher taking vocational/physical education(22). Hence majority of the teachers are taking science teachers.
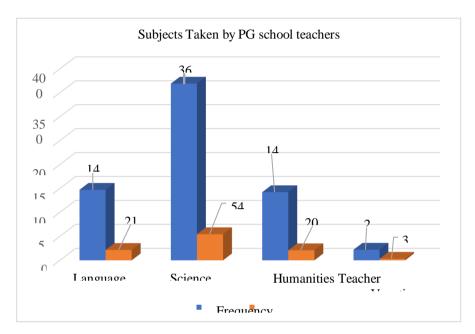

Figure 2: Subject Taken by PG School Teachers

Table 3: Type of School PG school Teachers Working

S.no	Type of School PG school Teachers Working	Frequency	Percent
1.	Government School	505	74.3
2.	Government Aided School	85	12.5
3.	Private Management	90	13.2
	Total	680	100.0

Table 3 shows type of school PG teachers are working, 74.3% of the PG teachers are working in Government School (505) followed by 13.2% of them are working in private management(90) and 12.5% of the PG teachers are working in Government aided school (85). Hence sizable numbers of PG school teachers are working in Government schools.
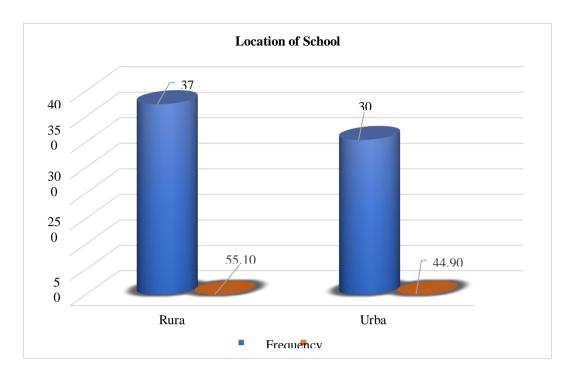
Location of School

Figure 3: Subject Taken by PG School Teachers

Table 4: Location of the School

S.no	Gender Group	Frequency	Percent
1.	Rural	375	55.1%
2.	Urban	305	44.9%
	Total	680	100.0

Table 4 displays location of school were PG teachers are working, 55.1% of the PG teachers are working in rural schools (375) followed by 44.9% of the teachers are working in urban schools(305). Hence, sizable numbers of PG school teachers are working in School established in rural area.
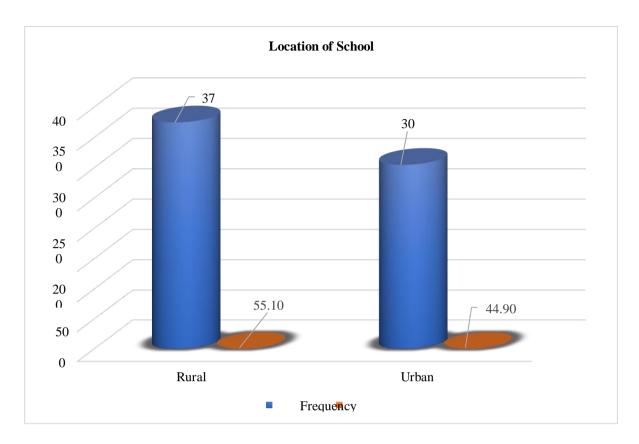
Location of School

Figure 4: Location of School

Table 5: Annual Income of PG School Teachers

S.no	Annual Income of PG School Teachers	Frequency	Percent
1.	Rs.10,000 to Rs.25,000	91	13.4
2.	Rs.26,000 to Rs.50,000	221	32.5
3.	RS.51,000 to Rs.75,000	186	27.4
4.	Rs.76,000 to Rs.1,00,000	151	22.2
5.	Rs.1,00,000 to Rs.1,50,000	31	4.6
	Total	680	100.0

Table 5 shows annual income of the PG school teachers, 32.5% of the PG teachers are earning between Rs.26,000 to Rs.50,000(221) followed by 27.4% of them are earning between Rs.51,000 to Rs.75,000(186), 22.2% of them are earning between Rs.76,000 toRs.1,00,000(151), 13.4% of them are earning between Rs.10,000 to Rs.25,000(91) and rest 4.6% of them are earning between Rs.1,00,000 to Rs.1,50,000(31). Hence, majority of the PG school teachers are earning between Rs.26, 000 to Rs.50, 000.
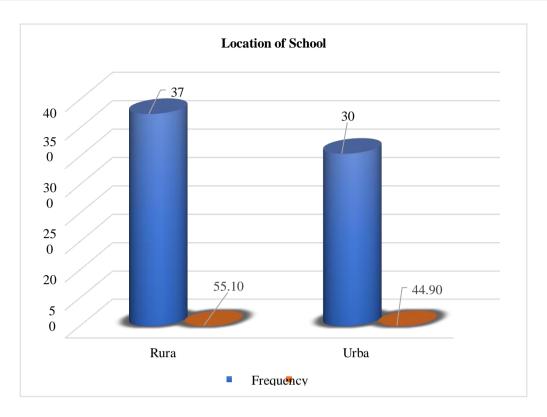
Location of School

Figure 5: Annual Income of PG School Teachers

Table 6: Salary Satisfaction of the PG school Teachers

S.no	Salary Satisfaction of the PG school Teachers	Frequency	Percent
1.	Sufficient	409	60.1
2.	Insufficient	153	22.5
3.	No Opinion	118	17.4
	Total	680	100.0

Table 6 shows opinion of PG school teachers on salary, 60.1% of the PG school teachers are satisfied with their salary (409) followed by 22.5% of them are dissatisfied with their salary (153) and rest 17.4% of them show no opinion on their earnings (118). Hence, sizable numbers of PG school teachers are satisfied with their salary.
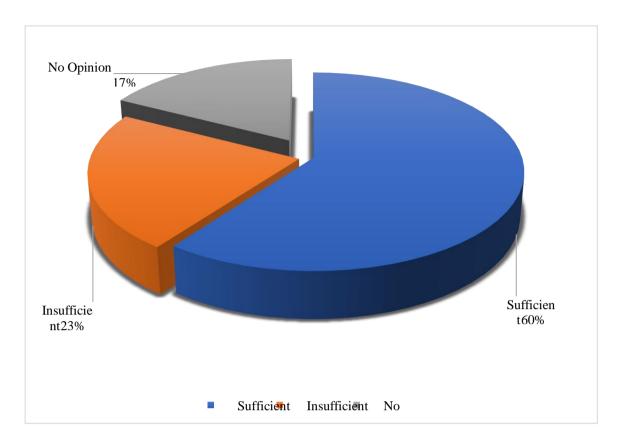
No Opinion 17%

Insufficient 23%

Sufficient 60%

Sufficient   Insufficient   No

Figure 6: Annual Income of PG School Teachers

Table 7: Mother Language of PG school Teachers

S.no	Mother Language of PG School Teachers	Frequency	Percent
1.	Tamil	621	91.3
2.	Talugu, Maliyalam, Karnada, Urdu	59	8.7
	Total	680	100.0

Table 7 displays mother language of PG school teaches, 91.3% of them are belong to Tamil mother language (621) followed by 8.7% of them are from Talugu, Malayalam, Karnada, Urdu mother language. Hence, majority of PG school teacher's mother language is Tamil.
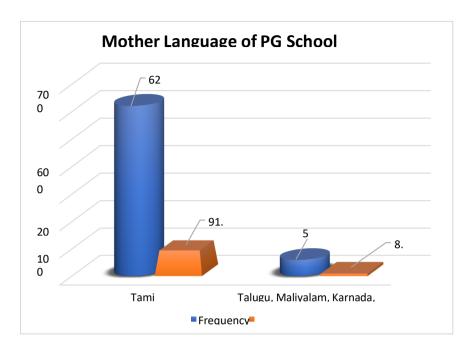
Mother Language of PG School

Figure 7: Mother Language of PG School Teachers

Table 8: Religion of PG School Teachers

S.no	Religion of PG School Teachers	Frequency	Percent
1.	Hindu	576	84.7
2.	Muslim	60	8.8
3.	Christian	44	6.5
	Total	680	100.0

Table 8 shows religion of PG school teachers, 84.7% of them are from Hindu religion (576) followed by 8.8% are belongs to Muslim religion (60) and 6.5% of them belongs to Christianity religion (44). There for, sizable numbers of PG school teachers are from Hindu religion.
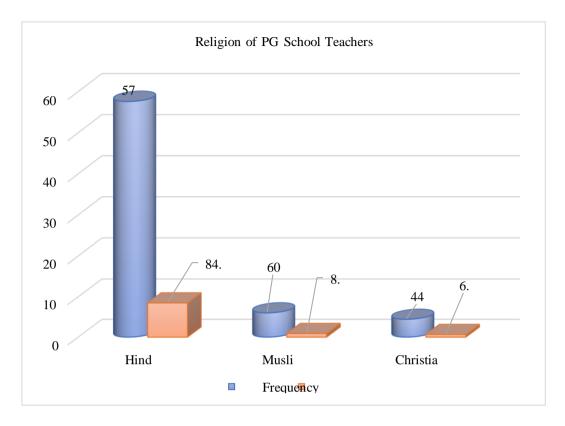
Figure 8: Religion of PG School Teachers

Table 9: Cast of PG school Teachers

S.no	Cast of PG school Teachers	Frequency	Percent
1.	SC/ST	154	22.6
2.	BC/BC(M)	225	33.1
3.	MBC	286	42.1
4.	FC/OC	15	2.2
	Total	680	100.0

Table 9 exhibits the cast of the PG school teachers, 42.1% of the PG school teachers are belong to MBC(286) followed by 33.1% of them are BC/BC(M)(225), 22.6% of them are from SC/ST groups (154) and rest 2.2% of them are from FC/OC groups(15). Hence, common numbers of PG school teachers are belong to backward cast.
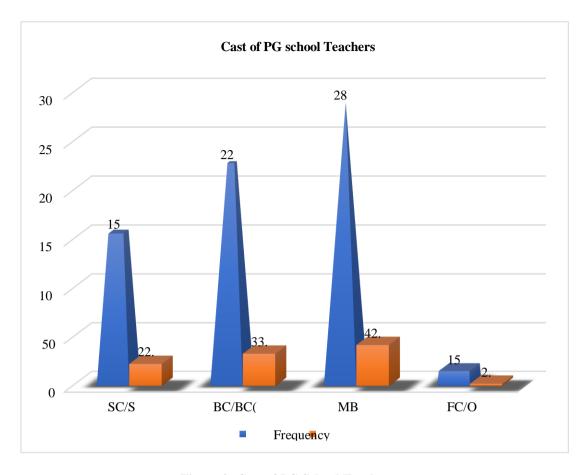
Figure 9: Cast of PG School Teachers

Table 10: Marital Status of PG school teachers

S.no	Marital Status of PG school teachers	Frequency	Percent
1.	Married	656	96.5
2.	Unmarried	24	3.5
	Total	680	100.0

        Table 10 shows marital status of the PG school teachers, 96.5% of them are married (656) and rest 3.5% of them are unmarried (24). Thus, common numbers of PG school teachers are married.
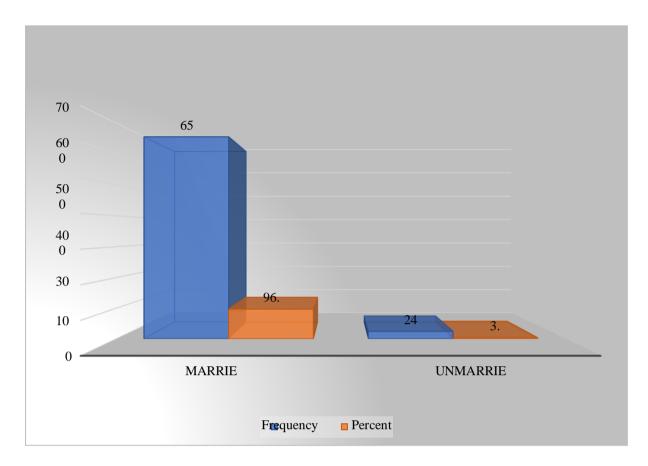
Figure 10: Marital Status of PG school teachers

Table 11: Number of Children having by PG school Teachers

S.no	Number of Children having by PG school Teachers	Frequency	Percent
1.	Male child	170	25.0
2.	Female Child	166	24.4
3.	Male and Female child	273	40.1
4.	None	71	10.4
	Total	680	100.0

Table 11 shows number of children having by PG school teachers, 40.1% of the teachers having both male and female child (273) followed by 25% of the teachers are having only male child (170), 24.4% of them are having female child only (166) and 10.4% of the teachers have no child. Hence majority of the PG school teachers are having both male and female child.
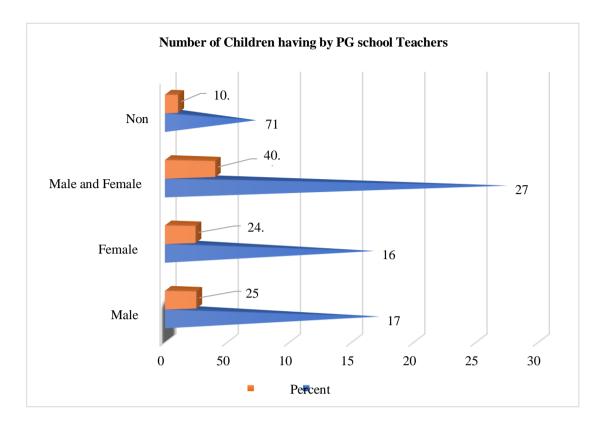
Number of Children having by PG school Teachers

Figure 11: Number of Children Having PG School Teachers

CONCLUSIONS AND FINDINGS
Association between Profile Groups and Activities of PG School Teachers

- The 65.2% of male teachers are taking Science subject to PG school students followed by 45% of female teachers are taking science subjects to PG school students. Hence, majority 54.3% of PG school teaches are taking science subject at school.

- The 76.2% PG language teachers are closely associated with Government school followed by 13.6% are associated with government aided schools. 71.5% of PG science teachers are belong to Government school followed by 16.3% are working in private schools. 82.4% of the Humanities PG school teachers are working Government schools followed by 10.6% of them are working in private schools and 54.5% of PG vocational/physical education teachers are working in Government schools followed by 45.5% of them are working in Government aided schools. Hence, sizable number of PG school teachers are working in government schools.

- 64.4% of the Government school are located at rural locations followed by 35.6% of government school are located at urban area. 58.8% of the government abided school are located in rural area followed by 41.2% of the government school are located at urban area. 100% of the private school are located at urban location. Hence, majority of schools are located in rural area.

- Maximum 40.8% of the PG school teachers working in Government schools are closely associated with income group of Rs.26,000 to Rs.50,000 followed by 35.8% of them are earning between Rs.51,000 to Rs.75,000.

Majority 52.9% of the PG school teachers working in Government aided schools are closely associated with income group of Rs.76,000 to Rs.1,00,000. 94.4% of the PG school teachers working in private school are closely associated with income group of Rs.10,000 to Rs.25,000. Hence sizable number of PG school teachers are earning good amount of salary.

- 66.1% of PG school teachers working in government schools are closely associated with satisfaction from salary, 88.2% of PG school teachers working in government aided school are closely associated with satisfaction from salary and 94.4% of the PG school teachers working in private school are closely associated with not satisfaction from salary. Thus, majority of PG school teachers are satisfied with their salary.

- The PG school teachers working in government school are closely associated with Higher social maturity group. While those are working in government aided schools are closely associated with higher social maturity groups and those are working private management are closely associated with highest social maturity groups.

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