The Fine-tuning of EFL Reading Anxiety Instrument (EFLRAI): An Exploratory Factor Analysis

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Abstract

The EFL reading anxiety instrument (EFLRAI) was originally designed to be applicable across a broad range of EFL reading courses across various disciplines at tertiary education and to provide a common framework for comparative analysis. In this study, the processes of investigating the factor structure of the EFLRAI and its psychometric evaluation will be discussed. Various statistical procedures were employed to explore the factor structure (explanatory factor analysis) and to provide an indication of the internal consistency (reliability) of the measurement instrument. The empirical results emphasized the importance of assuming a multi-dimensional approach to EFL reading anxiety. The study also revealed that Top-down Reading Anxiety, Bottom-up Reading Anxiety, and Classroom Reading Anxiety are important dimensions for measuring EFL reading anxiety. Finally, implication for further research and limitations of the study are provided.

Key terms: Reading anxiety, Exploratory factor analysis, EFL reading, Instrument

1. Introduction

Research on reading anxiety has been ongoing for over a decade now since reading experts have expressed concerns for the role of affect in L2 reading (Bernhardt, 2000, 2003), and particularly for foreign language (FL) reading anxiety, which, as they contend, influences reading comprehension and processes (Saito, Horwitz, & Garza, 1999; Sellers, 2000). This has in turn prompted researchers to begin to measure FL reading anxiety among learners. Crucial to the measurement of FL reading anxiety is the availability of an instrument that can measure the reading anxiety of FL learners in a valid manner. Otherwise, there is a danger that reading researchers can mis-measure or mis-evaluate FL reading success if they do not employ a valid FL reading anxiety instrument. Although the foreign language reading anxiety scale (FLRAS) developed by Saito, et al. (1999) has been commonly used to measure FL reading anxiety of language learners, Zoghi (2012) developed the English as a Foreign Language Reading Anxiety Inventory (EFLRAI, in Farsi) in response to the shortcomings of FLRAS [for a critical review of FLRAS, see Zoghi (2012)]. The EFLRAI has been specifically constructed for a survey of English as a foreign language (EFL) reading anxiety of non-English major students in the context of tertiary education. The pioneering work of Zoghi (2012) shows that EFL reading anxiety
is a multi-dimensional concept comprising three related factors: (a) Top-down Reading Anxiety; (b) Bottom-up Reading Anxiety; and (c) Classroom Reading Anxiety. These factors had, however, been produced using qualitative data analysis. Thus, to provide statistical support for this finding, it was considered necessary to conduct a factor analytic study on the EFLRAI so that it could be possible to firmly establish construct validity of the EFLRAI for use among non-English majors in tertiary education. Besides, to our knowledge no studies have yet been conducted to statistically assess the factor structure of this newly developed measure. As Zoghi (2012, p. 49) states, “validity is almost always a continuous process (construct validation); thus, confirmation in future research is warranted.” In sum, the primary purpose of this study was to test the psychometric properties and the factor structure of the EFLRAI among Iranian university-bound non-English majors by means of explanatory factor analysis.

2. Methods
2.1 Participants of the study
This study was conducted in the academic year of 2011-2012 at Islamic Azad University – Ahar Branch located in the eastern Azarbaijan province of Iran. A sample of 469 students was chosen. The selected students were studying different undergraduate programs offered by the faculties of (i) Humanities ($n = 157$), (ii) Basic Sciences ($n = 121$), and (iii) Technical and Engineering ($n = 191$). Of the 469 participants, 58 percent were males ($n = 271$), with a mean ($SD$) age of 25 (2.36) years, and 42 percent females ($n = 198$) with a mean ($SD$) age of 22 (1.98) years. Some students ($n = 9$) did not indicate their age and gender in the study. The study cohort consisted of both monolinguals and bilinguals, i.e. they were able to speak only Farsi or both Azeri and Farsi. Students’ proficiency level of English was also estimated through self-reports placed in the first section of the instrument (EFLRAI). Results showed that the self-reported English proficiency level of students ranged from low to medium (44.2% = Poor; 35.8% = Fair; 17.9% = Good; 2.1% = Excellent). No financial reward was provided for students participating in the study.

2.2 Instrument of the study
The research instrument of the study, the EFLRAI, consists of 27 items which are rated on a 4-point Likert format, with 1 (totally disagree) to 4 (totally agree). Scores range from a low of 27 to a high of 108, with higher scores reflecting greater perceived EFL reading anxiety. The EFLRAI has three sections that match the three factors emerged in the qualitative data analysis in Zoghi’s (2012) study. The three sections are (i) TRA (Top-down Reading Anxiety, items 1–7; (ii) BRA (Bottom-up Reading Anxiety, items 8–21; and (iii) CRA (Classroom Reading Anxiety, items 22–27). The EFLRAI has been reported as having acceptable validity and reliability (Zoghi, 2012).

2.3 Procedure
Verbal consent for conducting the study was secured both from the academic administration office of the university and from the instructors of the classes. Within a period of three weeks in the academic year of 2011-2012, the EFLRAI questionnaires were administered by the current researcher to 469 students at the Islamic Azad University, Ahar Branch in Iran. Respondents were instructed to rate each item of the 27-item instrument on a 4-point Likert scale of 1 = totally disagree to 4 = totally agree. Several respondents did not provide information for some items. In
fact, a total of 464 questionnaires were fully completed and returned. The data were then entered into SPSS 16 for relevant analysis.

2.4 Statistical analysis
Participants’ responses to the EFLRAI were coded and entered into SPSS 16. Some of the respondents, as mentioned earlier, provided no information for several items on the inventory. Therefore, it was decided that those students who did not provide a response to three or more items were excluded from subsequent analysis. Accordingly, 5 students were excluded from the study. That left a sample of 464 students.

Exploratory factor analysis (EFA) typically explores and identifies the possible underlying factor structure of a measurement instrument (Child, 1990). The EFLRAI was factor-analyzed using a principal component analysis (PCA) available in SPSS 16. According to Tabachnick & Fidell (2007), the nature of PCA is exploratory. PCA was performed in order to (i) identify the factor structure and also (ii) examine the construct validity of the EFLRAI. In addition to the above statistical analysis, we also estimated the internal consistency or reliability of the EFLRAI by determining the Cronbach's α (alpha) coefficient.

3. Results
3.1 EFA results
To meet the criteria of the PCA approach for identifying the factor structure, the suitability of data was first assessed. The preliminary analysis of the correlation matrix indicated moderate Pearson correlation coefficients, i.e. many coefficients were .3 and above. Also, the value of the determinant of the correlation matrix (0.000512) for these data was greater than the necessary value of 0.00001. Since all items in the EFLRAI correlated reasonably well with all others and none of the correlation coefficients were large, no items were eliminated at this stage.

The Kaiser–Meyer–Olkin (KMO) measure of sampling adequacy and Bartlett’s test of sphericity were checked. The KMO analysis verified the sampling adequacy for the analysis, KMO = .93, which according to Kaiser's (1974) recommendations, values above 0.9 are excellent.

Bartlett’s test of sphericity for these data reached statistical significance, \( \chi^2 (856) = 2458.4, p < .001 \), suggesting the factorability of the correlation matrix. All this information assured us that we could use the PCA approach to identify the factor model. PCA of 27 items, which was based on Varimax rotation, yielded a three-factor solution with eigenvalues over Kaiser’s criterion of 1. Thus, based on a priori expectations as to the factor structure, the three-factor solution was retained, which accounted for 47.64% of the variance (Table 1). The first factor (component) with a factor weight ≥ 0.45 accounted for 9.54% of the variance. This component representing “Top-down Reading Anxiety” consists of six items. The second factor identified as “Bottom-up Reading Anxiety” accounted for 20.52% of the variance. This component includes eleven items. The third factor denoted by “Classroom Reading Anxiety” accounted for 17.58% of the variance. This component is made up of six items. Conventionally, factor loadings 0.4 or greater are considered acceptable. This criterion was used in this study as it is the conventional guiding principle used to decide factor loadings that are worthy of interpreting (Manly, 1994).

Three items (7, 8, 11, and 14) out of total 27 items did not load onto any of the factors. This suggested that these items may not be appropriate and correlates with none of the components that emerged. Therefore, since these items had no significant loadings they were excluded and the final model consisted of 23 items. The means, standard deviations, and communalities for each item were also estimated as shown in Table 1. Except for the four excluded items (7, 8, 11,
and 14), for the remaining items, communalities were estimated ranging between .30 and .56. Items 7, 8, 11, and 14 had a communality ≤ 0.21, suggesting that these items do not correlate with other items in the data set. For the sake of comprehensibility, the back-translated, English version of the EFLRAI items are presented in Table 1.

Table 1 Summary of exploratory factor analysis (EFA) results for the EFLRAI (n = 464)*†‡

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No.</th>
<th>Item</th>
<th>F1</th>
<th>F2</th>
<th>F3</th>
<th>h²</th>
<th>M</th>
<th>SD</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>I do not feel at ease when the title of the text is unfamiliar to me</td>
<td>0.60</td>
<td>0.00</td>
<td>0.00</td>
<td>0.41</td>
<td>3.30</td>
<td>1.04</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>It is worrying to me when the ideas expressed in the text are culturally unclear</td>
<td>0.57</td>
<td>0.00</td>
<td>0.00</td>
<td>0.43</td>
<td>3.54</td>
<td>1.15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>I get upset when I lack the previous knowledge about the ideas expressed in the text</td>
<td>0.63</td>
<td>0.00</td>
<td>0.00</td>
<td>0.52</td>
<td>2.32</td>
<td>1.07</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>I worry when I cannot get the gist of the text although no new vocabulary items or grammatical points exist in the text</td>
<td>0.67</td>
<td>0.00</td>
<td>0.00</td>
<td>0.33</td>
<td>3.44</td>
<td>1.21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>When I cannot recognize minor ideas (details) of the text is worrying to me</td>
<td>0.45</td>
<td>0.00</td>
<td>0.00</td>
<td>0.36</td>
<td>3.30</td>
<td>1.20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>I am nervous when I cannot spot the main idea of a certain paragraph</td>
<td>0.63</td>
<td>0.00</td>
<td>0.00</td>
<td>0.56</td>
<td>2.30</td>
<td>1.39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>It bothers me when I cannot express my opinions or feelings about the text</td>
<td>0.00</td>
<td>0.00</td>
<td>0.00</td>
<td>0.23</td>
<td>2.10</td>
<td>1.44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>I feel uneasy when I cannot figure out meanings of unknown words</td>
<td>0.00</td>
<td>0.00</td>
<td>0.00</td>
<td>0.21</td>
<td>2.68</td>
<td>1.23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>It bothers me when I encounter a lot of words whose meanings are unclear</td>
<td>0.00</td>
<td>0.45</td>
<td>0.00</td>
<td>0.30</td>
<td>3.31</td>
<td>1.40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>I get upset when I cannot figure out the meaning of a word that I feel I have seen before</td>
<td>0.00</td>
<td>0.51</td>
<td>0.00</td>
<td>0.43</td>
<td>3.78</td>
<td>1.29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>It bothers me when I feel unable to look up a word in the dictionary</td>
<td>0.00</td>
<td>0.00</td>
<td>0.00</td>
<td>0.11</td>
<td>2.10</td>
<td>1.40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>I get confused when the word that I know has a different meaning in the sentence</td>
<td>0.00</td>
<td>0.64</td>
<td>0.00</td>
<td>0.56</td>
<td>3.49</td>
<td>1.42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>I get upset when I come across idioms that are unfamiliar to me</td>
<td>0.00</td>
<td>0.57</td>
<td>0.00</td>
<td>0.48</td>
<td>3.11</td>
<td>1.09</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>It makes me feel uneasy when an unfamiliar is made up of several parts or syllables</td>
<td>0.00</td>
<td>0.00</td>
<td>0.00</td>
<td>0.16</td>
<td>3.20</td>
<td>1.13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15</td>
<td>I feel worried when the unknown word is difficult to pronounce</td>
<td>0.00</td>
<td>0.69</td>
<td>0.00</td>
<td>0.54</td>
<td>3.40</td>
<td>1.37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16</td>
<td>I am nervous when a certain sentence is long and has a complex structure</td>
<td>0.00</td>
<td>0.46</td>
<td>0.00</td>
<td>0.39</td>
<td>1.20</td>
<td>1.56</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17</td>
<td>When a certain sentence is grammatically unfamiliar is worrying to me</td>
<td>0.00</td>
<td>0.61</td>
<td>0.00</td>
<td>0.52</td>
<td>3.90</td>
<td>1.29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18</td>
<td>It bothers me when a passive voice is used in a sentence</td>
<td>0.00</td>
<td>0.50</td>
<td>0.00</td>
<td>0.48</td>
<td>3.67</td>
<td>1.87</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19</td>
<td>I feel upset when the tense of a certain sentence is unclear to me</td>
<td>0.00</td>
<td>0.48</td>
<td>0.00</td>
<td>0.36</td>
<td>2.88</td>
<td>1.07</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20</td>
<td>I worry when I am unable to recognize different parts of speech such as adjectives, adverbs, or connective words</td>
<td>0.00</td>
<td>0.59</td>
<td>0.00</td>
<td>0.34</td>
<td>3.66</td>
<td>1.79</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21</td>
<td>I get confused when what I know about a grammatical point does not make any sense</td>
<td>0.00</td>
<td>0.66</td>
<td>0.00</td>
<td>0.45</td>
<td>3.10</td>
<td>1.45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>22</td>
<td>It bothers me when the instructor calls on me to read out</td>
<td>0.00</td>
<td>0.00</td>
<td>0.46</td>
<td>0.39</td>
<td>3.20</td>
<td>1.36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>23</td>
<td>It worries me when the instructor calls on me to translate a piece of an English text into our first language</td>
<td>0.00</td>
<td>0.00</td>
<td>0.54</td>
<td>0.47</td>
<td>3.42</td>
<td>1.28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>24</td>
<td>When the instructor asks me reading comprehension questions is worrying to me</td>
<td>0.00</td>
<td>0.00</td>
<td>0.46</td>
<td>0.51</td>
<td>3.11</td>
<td>1.09</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25</td>
<td>It upsets me when the instructor chooses uninteresting texts to read in class</td>
<td>0.00</td>
<td>0.00</td>
<td>0.48</td>
<td>0.64</td>
<td>3.18</td>
<td>1.34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>26</td>
<td>It makes me feel uneasy when the instructor corrects my pronunciation or translation mistakes</td>
<td>0.00</td>
<td>0.00</td>
<td>0.55</td>
<td>0.60</td>
<td>3.56</td>
<td>1.67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>27</td>
<td>I am nervous when the instructor uses English as a medium of instruction and hardly ever makes use of our first language</td>
<td>0.00</td>
<td>0.00</td>
<td>0.49</td>
<td>0.56</td>
<td>2.39</td>
<td>1.80</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**% of variance** 9.54 20.52 17.58

**Alpha (α)** 0.64 0.73 0.60

* The factor labels are: F1, Top-down Reading Anxiety; F2, Bottom-up Reading Anxiety; F3, Classroom Reading Anxiety
† h² is used to denote communality coefficients
‡ The factor pattern coefficients < 0.40 were replaced by zeros
3.2 Internal consistency results

Furthermore, to check the internal consistencies for the entire instrument and its subscales, Cronbach’s alpha was computed. Although the Cronbach-alpha internal consistency estimate for the 27-item EFLRAI was .89 (Zoghi, 2012), the value of alpha calculated for these data was 0.79. An item-total correlation test was performed to check if any item (technically called ‘garbage’ items) in the measure is inconsistent (does not correlate) with the total score, and thus can be discarded. The analysis showed that correlation values were greater than 0.3. Accordingly, no item needed to be dropped. In three subscales of the instrument, the internal consistency coefficients were 0.64 for the first factor, 0.73 for the second factor, and 0.60 for the third factor. Overall, since Cronbach’s alpha of 0.70 or greater for the entire instrument is usually considered an acceptable reliability coefficient (Nunnaly & Bernstein, 1999), it is evident that the EFLRAI has re-exhibited decent reliability.

4. Discussion

In the current study, attempts were made to fine-tune a pre-existing EFL reading anxiety instrument, the EFLRAI. Findings of the study provided further support for the multidimensionality of EFL reading anxiety reported in Zoghi’s (2012) research. An interesting point regarding this study is that it was able to demonstrate that what was qualitatively obtained could be confirmed quantitatively through statistical analyses. A principal component factor analysis with Varimax rotation was used to determine the underlying structure of the data. Similar to previous qualitative research (Kuru-Gonen, 2005; Zoghi, 2012), it was found that EFL reading anxiety is composed of three components (see Appendix A for the English version of the EFLRAI): (1) Top-down Reading Anxiety (TRA) which is mainly reader-specific and consists of readers’ background and cultural knowledge and also of their general reading ability (items 1-6); (2) Bottom-up Reading Anxiety (BRA) which is text-specific in nature and is related to EFL vocabulary and grammar (items 7-17); and (3) Classroom Reading Anxiety (CRA) which concerns the setting in which the first and second factors interact, namely the way reading lessons (EFL texts) are delivered (by the instructor) to the learners (readers) (items 18-23).

Findings of the study support that the current 23-item EFLRAI (Farsi version) is a valid and reliable measure and can be used for Iranian non-English majors in tertiary education. The EFLRAI can be of great use to educational institutions, practicing teachers, and those who participate in in-serve training programs. The measure can be introduced to them and they become aware of different anxiety-related factors affecting EFL reading performance. While these educational practitioners learn about their students’ perceptions regarding factors producing reading anxiety, they can take effective steps to eliminate those factors that provoke reading anxiety in their students. Results from such assessments can further be used to modify EFL reading programs in educational institutions and private language institutes. Similarly, results obtained from the EFLRAI can help reading researchers with their studies in the field of affect. They may conduct various lines of, for instance, correlational research to find out about the relationship between EFL reading anxiety and language proficiency, gender, reading strategies, or learning strategies.

4.1 Limitations of the study

For the present study, the data collection was confined to only one institution and the sample was limited to three faculties of Humanities, Basic Sciences, and Technical and Engineering. This sample is only a very small proportion of the entire population of non-English major students in
the country. Therefore, research studies with other students from other disciplines and with much larger sample size would ensure better generalization of the findings of the study. This was the first study to investigate the factor structure of the EFLRAI via EFA. In light of the problems associated with the EFA approach (Kinnear & Gray, 2009), the dimensionality of this measure needs to be confirmed through confirmatory factor analysis.

5. Conclusion
Undoubtedly, construction of a measurement instrument can be a complex process. The results of this study provided statistical support for the utility of the EFLRAI as a psychometrically valid and reliable instrument for measuring EFL reading anxiety among Iranian non-English major students in tertiary education. With the introduction of the EFLRAI, it is hoped that the present study can help add to our growing body of knowledge that we have about the assessment of EFL reading anxiety.

Acknowledgments
The authors would like to offer their sincere and heartfelt thanks to the instructors and the participants at Islamic Azad University – Ahar branch for participating and cooperating earnestly in this study.

Endnote
Readers who are interested in having the Farsi version of the EFLRAI, please contact the first author of the article at dr.m.zoghi@gmail.com

References
Appendix A

English Version of EFL Reading Anxiety Inventory (EFLRAI)

EFLRAI, ©M. Zoghi, 2012

This questionnaire does **not** intend to gauge your EFL reading ability. Nor is it a test that you can score high or low. In fact, this questionnaire helps us help you i.e. by knowing about your true responses, we will be able to find out when you undergo anxiety while reading in English. This may enable us to be well-prepared in your future English classes. Thus, your cooperation can certainly make a big difference. Thanks for your time in advance.

Age: ............ Gender:          Male □          Female □

Current Proficiency in English: Poor □ Fair □ Good □ Excellent □

**Directions:** Statements 1–23 refer to how you feel about reading in English. Please read all of the statements and tick the option that describes you by indicating whether you (1) totally disagree, (2) somewhat disagree, (3) somewhat agree, or (4) totally agree.

1. **I do not feel at ease when the title of the text is unfamiliar to me.**
   (1) totally disagree (2) somewhat disagree (3) somewhat agree (4) totally agree

2. **It is worrying to me when the ideas expressed in the text are culturally unclear.**
   (1) totally disagree (2) somewhat disagree (3) somewhat agree (4) totally agree

3. **I get upset when I lack the previous knowledge about the ideas expressed in the text.**
   (1) totally disagree (2) somewhat disagree (3) somewhat agree (4) totally agree

4. **I worry when I cannot get the gist of the text although no new vocabulary items or grammatical points exist in the text.**
   (1) totally disagree (2) somewhat disagree (3) somewhat agree (4) totally agree

5. **When I cannot recognize minor ideas (details) of the text is worrying to me.**
   (1) totally disagree (2) somewhat disagree (3) somewhat agree (4) totally agree

6. **I am nervous when I cannot spot the main idea of a certain paragraph.**
   (1) totally disagree (2) somewhat disagree (3) somewhat agree (4) totally agree

7. **It bothers me when I encounter a lot of words whose meanings are unclear.**
   (1) totally disagree (2) somewhat disagree (3) somewhat agree (4) totally agree

8. **I get upset when I cannot figure out the meaning of a word that I feel I have seen before.**
   (1) totally disagree (2) somewhat disagree (3) somewhat agree (4) totally agree

9. **I get confused when the word that I know has a different meaning in the sentence.**
   (1) totally disagree (2) somewhat disagree (3) somewhat agree (4) totally agree

10. **I get upset when I come across idioms that are unfamiliar to me.**
    (1) totally disagree (2) somewhat disagree (3) somewhat agree (4) totally agree

11. **I feel worried when the unknown word is difficult to pronounce.**
12. I am nervous when a certain sentence is long and has a complex structure.
(1) totally disagree (2) somewhat disagree (3) somewhat agree (4) totally agree

13. When a certain sentence is grammatically unfamiliar is worrying to me.
(1) totally disagree (2) somewhat disagree (3) somewhat agree (4) totally agree

14. It bothers me when a passive voice is used in a sentence.
(1) totally disagree (2) somewhat disagree (3) somewhat agree (4) totally agree

15. I feel upset when the tense of a certain sentence is unclear to me.
(1) totally disagree (2) somewhat disagree (3) somewhat agree (4) totally agree

16. I worry when I am unable to recognize different parts of speech such as adjectives, adverbs, or connective words.
(1) totally disagree (2) somewhat disagree (3) somewhat agree (4) totally agree

17. I get confused when what I know about a grammatical point does not make any sense.
(1) totally disagree (2) somewhat disagree (3) somewhat agree (4) totally agree

18. It bothers me when the instructor calls on me to read out.
(1) totally disagree (2) somewhat disagree (3) somewhat agree (4) totally agree

19. It worries me when the instructor calls on me to translate a piece of an English text into our first language.
(1) totally disagree (2) somewhat disagree (3) somewhat agree (4) totally agree

20. When the instructor asks me reading comprehension questions is worrying to me.
(1) totally disagree (2) somewhat disagree (3) somewhat agree (4) totally agree

21. It upsets me when the instructor chooses uninteresting texts to read in class.
(1) totally disagree (2) somewhat disagree (3) somewhat agree (4) totally agree

22. It makes me feel uneasy when the instructor corrects my pronunciation or translation mistakes.
(1) totally disagree (2) somewhat disagree (3) somewhat agree (4) totally agree

23. I am nervous when the instructor uses English as a medium of instruction and hardly ever makes use of our first language.
(1) totally disagree (2) somewhat disagree (3) somewhat agree (4) totally agree

Thank you for taking time to complete this questionnaire.
We appreciate your comments.