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An Investigation into University Students' Foreign Language Speaking Anxiety

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Abstract

How anxiety affects the learning a foreign language is a focus in the current studies such as Horwitz's (1986), and MacIntyre and Gardner's (1994). Taking into consideration this focus, the aim of this study is to identify whether the students' foreign language speaking anxiety demonstrate significant differences in terms of their gender, language level, receiving English preparatory training, and the kind of high school they graduated from. The research group included 320 male (65.6 %) and 168 female (34.4 %) English preparatory students at Istanbul Technical University. Foreign Language Speaking Anxiety Questionnaire developed by Horwitz, Horwitz and Cope (1986) and adapted in Turkish by Saltan (2003) was used as the data collection tool. Data were analysed using independent samples T-test and one-way ANOVA. According to T-test results, it was seen that female students' score is higher than male students'. Also, it could be reported anxiety of students who have received English preparatory training are lower based on T-test results. Moreover, ANOVA results indicated the students' language level and the kind of high school do not affect their speaking anxiety. In a nutshell, the foreign language speaking anxiety is affected by gender and receiving English preparatory training.

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1. Introduction

Psychology plays an important role in learning environments as well as foreign language learning process (Chastain, 1975; Horwitz et al., 1986; Young, 1990; Samimy & Tabuse, 1992; Gardner & MacIntyre, 1993). Horwitz et al. (1986) and Gardner and MacIntyre (1993) highlighted the remarkable influence of affective factors including several determinants such as efficacy, empathy, and introversion on language learning process. There are many researches on the relationship between foreign language learning and affective variables. And, they focuses on a number of personality factors which may have positive or negative effects in foreign language learning process such as extroversion, self-esteem, motivation, and anxiety (Ozturk & Gurbuz, 2013). Anxiety which is one of personality factors is a research area in foreign language learning field for so long.

In speaking situations, foreign language learners are often anxious about their ability in a foreign language. MacIntyre and Gardner (1991) explained this type of anxiety as communication apprehension. Horwitz et al. (1986) mentioned talkative individuals even become silent in a foreign language class as they have speaking anxiety. Because of this, they put forward that it plays a crucial role in foreign language learning.

2. Review of literature

2.1. Foreign language anxiety

There are many definitions of anxiety in the literature. But, an unpleasant emotional condition characterized feelings of tension and apprehension is common definition of anxiety (Spielberger, 1983; as cited in Ozturk & Gurbuz, 2014). And, it is one of the conspicuous factors in every kind of learning with these negative implications. Foreign language learning is a process that is highly influenced by affective variables. Owing to these, anxiety can be associated with foreign language learning and this situation leads to come out the foreign language anxiety term.

Young (1990) pointed out that foreign language anxiety is a complex and multidimensional phenomenon. MacIntyre and Gardner (1993) defined it as the subjective feeling of tension and apprehension specifically associated with foreign language contexts, which include speaking, listening and learning. As reported by Horwitz et al. (1986), foreign language anxiety is a distinct complex of self-perceptions, feelings and behaviours which are related to a language learning classroom arising from the uniqueness of the language learning process. They suggested a theory on language learning anxiety which has three interrelated components; communication apprehension defined as a type of shyness characterized by fear of or anxiety about communicating with people, fear of negative evaluation which refers to the apprehension about others' evaluation, and test anxiety exemplified as type of performance anxiety stemming from a fear of failure.

And, this model led to a number of researches. The findings of Horwitz's (2001) study revealed students with high levels of anxiety received lower course grades than the students with lower levels of anxiety. Besides, the research of Saito and Samimy (1996) showed foreign language anxiety can have a negative impact on learners' performance. The study of Aida (1994) displayed foreign language anxiety is negatively related to foreign language learning. Nikolov and Djigunović (2006) carried out a different study and it brought to light that students with high levels of language anxiety produce smaller amounts of continuous speech in foreign language. In progress of time, the researchers became interested in conducting research on anxiety and language skills based on the descriptive power of this foreign language anxiety model. And, speaking skill attracted the most attention.

2.2. Foreign language speaking anxiety

In today's foreign language classrooms, students perform orally in front of a group or participate in group discussions. And, these demanding speaking tasks may affect the learners negatively and they may feel nervous when speaking in the target language (Tanveer, 2007). In accordance with Young (1990), speaking in the target language is stated as the most anxiety producing experience by learners.

There are many researchers who made investigation into students' foreign language speaking anxiety. For instance, Price (1991) found out the learners were anxious about making mistakes in pronunciation. Thanks to this, speaking in front of their peers is a very anxiety provoking activity for the foreign language learners. Also, Koch and Terrell

(1991) stated that the most anxiety producing activities are oral presentations, role-playing and defining words. In addition, Saltan (2003) who investigated the foreign language speaking anxiety from the point of students' and teachers' perspectives underlined students experience a certain degree of foreign language speaking anxiety, yet the intensity of it is not disturbingly high. Moreover, Balemir (2009) focused on the relationship between proficiency level and degree of foreign language speaking anxiety in English as a foreign language context. This study revealed Turkish EFL university students experience a moderate level of speaking anxiety. Furthermore, the findings of study conducted by Ay (2010) demonstrated learners' anxiety occurs most when they are required to speak without being prepared in advance. The researchers such as Betters (1986), Balemir (2009), Csizer and Dornyei (2005), Huang (2004) and Pugsley (1991) wanted to explore the effect of gender, which has been asserted to be a leading factor in language learning process, on foreign language speaking anxiety. According to their studies, it was highlighted that gender plays a significant role on foreign language speaking anxiety. Thus, the present study aims to find out whether gender is an influential factor on students' foreign language speaking anxiety and identify if the students' foreign language speaking anxiety demonstrate significant differences with regards to their language level, receiving English preparatory training, and the kind of high school they graduated from. For these purposes, following research questions are the frame for this study:

1. Is there a significant difference between female and male students in terms of foreign language speaking anxiety?
2. Is there any significant difference in students' foreign language speaking anxiety in terms of receiving English preparatory training?
3. Is there a significant relationship between students' foreign language speaking anxiety and the kind of high school they graduated from?
4. Does difference exist in students' foreign language speaking anxiety between their language levels?

3. Method

3.1. Participants and setting

The current study was conducted during 2015-2016 academic year with the participation of 320 male (65.6 %) and 168 female (34.4 %) English preparatory students at Istanbul Technical University. All participants took part in the study voluntarily. The distribution of the sample with respect to their receiving English preparatory training, the kind of high schools, and language levels are shown in Table 1.

Table 1. University students participating in the survey by receiving English preparatory training, the kind of high schools, and language levels

Demographic variables		f	%
Receiving English preparatory training	Yes	80	16.39
	No	408	83.61
	Total	488	100
The kind of high school	Anatolian high school	326	66.8
	Science high school	95	19.48
	Anatolian teacher training high school	47	9.63
	Open high school	9	1.84
	Vocational high school	11	2.25
	Total	488	100
Proficiency level	Upper	55	11.27
	Intermediate	259	53.07
	Pre-intermediate	174	35.65
	Total	488	100

3.1.1. Data collecting instrument

This research is based on survey design. Foreign Language Speaking Anxiety Questionnaire is used to investigate whether students experienced speaking anxiety and the degree of it. The questionnaire developed by Horwitz, Horwitz and Cope (1986) and adapted in Turkish by Saltan (2003) was used as the data collection instrument. Saltan (2003)

designed the questionnaire by selecting 18 items which were decided to be directly related to foreign language speaking anxiety from 33 items of original form. The questionnaire is a 5-graded Likert scale (1 = strongly disagree, 5 = strongly agree).

3.2. Analysis of data

Data acquired by means of the applications of Foreign Language Speaking Anxiety Questionnaire (FLSAQ) was analysed using independent samples t-test, one-way ANOVA via SPSS (Statistical Package for Social Sciences) 21.0 software program. The analysis of independent samples t-test was used to examine whether there was a significant difference in university students' foreign language speaking anxiety in terms of gender and receiving English preparatory training. Also, the analysis of one-way ANOVA was administered to determine if there were differences in university students' foreign language speaking anxiety according to their language levels and the kinds of high school they graduated from.

4. Findings

The data was analysed as it intends to explore gender, language level, receiving English preparatory training, and the kinds of high school they graduated from differences in university students' foreign language speaking anxiety in this section. It is summarised descriptive statistics on university students' foreign language speaking anxiety in Table 2.

Table 2. Means, standard deviations and maximum scores

	N	Mean	Min.	Max.	Std. D.	Std. E.
FLSA	488	48.47	18.00	90.00	15.41	.69

According to the findings in Table 2, the mean of foreign language classroom anxiety scores of university students is 48.47. And, it can be seen that the students receive the maximum 90 and minimum 18 points. Table 3 focuses on the students' foreign language speaking anxiety according to their gender.

Table 3. T-test analysis regarding university students' foreign language speaking anxiety in terms of gender

Gender	N	M	Std. D.	Std. E.	T	p
Male	320	46.78	14.65	.82	3.37	.00*
Female	168	51.69	16.33	1.26		

* The mean difference is significant at the .05 level

In Table 4, based on t-test result, it could be reported that female students' foreign language speaking anxiety (M=51.69) is higher than male students' foreign language speaking anxiety (M=46.78). In view of this, it was observed a significant difference in favour of female students ($t=3.37$, $p<.05$). According to this finding, it can be suggested that gender is a significant variable on students' foreign language speaking anxiety.

Table 4 addresses the students' foreign language speaking anxiety in terms of receiving English preparatory training.

Table 4. T-test analysis about university students' foreign language speaking anxiety according to receiving English preparatory training

Receiving preparatory training	N	M	Std. D.	Std. E.	T	p
Yes	80	49.11	14.67	1.68	.39	.69*
No	408	48.36	15.58	.77		

* The mean difference is significant at the .05 level

As it is observed in Table 4, however it could be reported anxiety of students who have received English

preparatory training are higher ($M=49.11$) based on T-test results, there is no statistically significant difference between students' foreign language speaking anxiety in terms of receiving English preparatory training ($t=-.39$; $p>.05$). In accordance with this finding, it can be suggested receiving English preparatory training is not a significant variable on students' foreign language speaking anxiety.

One-way ANOVA test was conducted to determine if there was a significant difference in the students' foreign language speaking anxiety according to the kind of high school they graduated from and their language level. Table 5 shows the descriptive statistics of the students' foreign language speaking anxiety in terms of the kind of high school.

Table 5. The descriptive statistics of the university students' foreign language speaking anxiety in accordance with the kind of high school they graduated from

Groups		Sum of squares	Degrees of freedom	Mean	F	p
FLSA	Between groups	475.22	4	118.80	.49	.73*
	Within groups	115078.24	484	238.75		
	Total	115553.47	488			

* The mean difference is significant at the .05 level

It is seen that there is no significant difference in the students' foreign language speaking anxiety according to the kind of high school ($F=.49$; $p>.05$) in Table 5. The result of the ANOVA test demonstrates that high school differentiation does not affect their foreign language speaking anxiety. It is also confirmed that there are no differences between groups.

Table 6 indicates the descriptive statistics of the students' foreign language speaking anxiety according to their language level.

Table 6. The descriptive statistics of the university students' foreign language speaking anxiety in terms of their language level

Groups		Sum of squares	Degrees of freedom	Mean	f	p
FLSA	Between groups	760.53	4	380.26	1.60	.20*
	Within groups	114792.94	484	237.17		
	Total	115553.47	488			

* The mean difference is significant at the .05 level

According to the data in Table 6, it is noticed that there is no significant difference in the students' foreign language speaking anxiety according to their language level ($F=1.60$; $p>.05$). The ANOVA test's result shows that foreign language level differentiation does not influence on their foreign language speaking anxiety. Also, it is approved that there is no differences between groups.

5. Discussion

In the current study, the level of foreign language speaking anxiety was analysed in terms of gender. The findings showed that the female university students were more anxious than the males. These results are in line with Wilson's (2006) and Huang's (2004) studies' findings. Also, Aydin (2001) suggests that self-comparison to others causes learners to show more competitive behaviours. Because the learners give more importance to achievement and want to be more successful, it may cause them to be more anxious especially in oral exams. And also, this may be explained with the attitudes of them towards language learning as female participants were found to be more anxious in these situations. The finding can be considered to come as no surprise in this sense.

As the results are analysed with regards to the relationship between foreign language speaking anxiety and students' proficiency levels, it was noticed that the language level did not have any effects on the students' levels of foreign

language speaking anxiety. However, many researchers have found relationships between language speaking anxiety and proficiency level in L2. For example, Dalkilic (2001) and Liu (2006) found that the level of foreign language speaking anxiety decreased whereas language level increased. But, according to their study's findings, Llinas and Garau (2009) stated that advanced level learners of Spanish had the highest level of foreign language speaking anxiety since they aimed to work with Spanish people, and felt more responsibility for language learning. That is to say, since the present study's result is at variance with the results of another studies, it can be said it is new in the literature.

Yanar (2008) underlined that the international relations developed and the importance of mass media increased after World War II. Because of those, the need for foreign language also increased and to meet the growing needs of foreign language learning, Anatolian High Schools became to provide training in 1975, in Turkey. According to Yanar (2008), individuals who graduated from Anatolian High Schools where a year foreign language preparatory education were given were more successful in foreign language learning. But, their training systems have changed over the years. And, teacher high schools, general and vocational high schools were also subjected to these changes. Thus, there was a declination in duration of foreign language teaching in high schools (Erguder, 2005). Nevertheless, in accordance with the current study's results, it was seen that there are no significant differences between the students' foreign language speaking anxiety according to the kind of high school and receiving English preparatory training.

6. Recommendations

When the findings of the study are considered, it can be suggested some ideas for the researchers for further research. First of all, this study investigated and evaluated the information of the students at the time of the questionnaire. For this reason, the study may be done with students in a long period of time by observing the levels of foreign language speaking anxiety. Secondly, this study conducted with the participation of 488 English preparatory students. Further studies may be carried out with a larger sample group. And, finally, more qualitative data may be collected through observation or interview techniques in order to provide a wide variety of information in further studies.

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