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THE LANGUAGE ANXIETY AND POSSIBLE WAYS OF REDUCTION IT IN EFL CLASSES

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DİL KAYGISI VE YABANCI DİL SINIFLARINDA AZALTILMASININ OLASI YOLLARI

Öz

Türkiye’de İngilizce öğrenenlerin şikayet ettikleri en önemli sorunların başında istendik bir şekilde konuşulamamasıdır. Bunun arkasında birçok neden olduğu düşünülmektedir. Ama en önemli olanı ise kaygı olarak düşünülmektedir. Bu noktada kaygı ikinci dil öğrenilirken ya da kullanılırken ortaya çıkan endişe verici ve negatif bir duygudur (MacIntyre, 1999). Bu araştırmaya Abant İzzet Baysal Üniversitesi İngilizce öğretmenliği bölümünden 90 öğrenci katılmıştır. Bu araştırmada Horwitz’s Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale kullanılmıştır. Kaygının cinsiyete, genel not ortalamasına ve öğrencinin bulunduğu sınıf düzeyine göre etkilenip etkilenmediği incelenmiştir. Araştırmanın bulguları kız öğrencilerin kaygısının erkeklere göre daha yüksek, birinci sınıfta kaygının diğer sınıflara göre daha yüksek olduğunu ve bu kaygının akademik başarıyla negatif olarak ilişkili olduğunu göstermektedir. Bu bulgular ilgili literatür ışığı altında tartışılmaktadır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Dil Kaygısı, Yabancı Dil Öğrenimi, İngilizce Öğretimi, Konuşma kaygısı, dil konuşma kaygısının azaltılması

Abstract

One of the biggest problems for university students in Turkey complaining about English language is that they can’t speak it in a desired way. There are many

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reasons behind it. The most vital one is language anxiety that students often experience. Language anxiety is defined as the worry and negative emotional reaction when learning and using second language (MacIntyre, 1999). This study examined the anxieties of 90 students from English language teaching (ELT) department at Abant Izzet Baysal University by using the Horwitz's Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale. Whether or not gender, overall grade point average(GPA) and pupil's grade affect anxiety was investigated in this study. Findings showed that females had higher anxiety than males, that freshmen students had higher anxiety than other class levels and anxiety was negatively correlated with GPA. Findings were discussed in lights of the relevant literature.

Keywords: Language anxiety; EFL; English language teaching; speaking anxiety; reduction of language speaking anxiety

1. Literature review

In the history of English language teaching, many studies have been conducted on language anxiety, suggesting that there is not only one component causing to the language anxiety (Akalm, 2015; Gardner & MacIntyre, 1993; Matsuda & Gobel, 2004; Mercer, 2011; Zerey, 2008). For example the task that gave pupils by teachers, the subjects such as science, language learning itself (Horwitz, Horwitz & Cope, 1986), difficulty in authentic self-presentation and language teaching practices (Horwitz, 2001) is associated with this anxiety. There are actually many reasons behind it. Some reasons on speaking anxiety arise from internal factors and some of them stem from external conditions (Mercer, 2011). Internal factors are the circumstances which are emerged particularly within the self. Internal factors include relations between native language (NL), second language (SL) and self-abilities. It also consists of judgemental thoughts about language and impacts on self. Through practising English, the learner's self-concept became more positive (Mercer, 2011).

External factors arise from primarily from outside the self. External factors consist of: 1) social comparisons; 2) feedback from significant others and reflected appraisals; 3) perceived experiences of success and failure; 4) previous language learning/use experiences in formal/informal contexts; and 5) critical experiences (Mercer, 2011). In the literature some techniques that include some of these above mentioned factors has been suggested to be beneficial to reducing speaking anxiety. For instance, speaking anxiety in EFL classes was found to be reduced thanks to using drama techniques (Atas, 2015). It has been understood that using drama techniques is one way of decreasing speaking anxiety in EFL classes. As

mentioned in Yalçın and İnceçay's study, group work and spontaneous speaking activities also contribute to reduction of speaking anxiety (Yalçın & İnceçay, 2014). It is clear that group work has a positive effect on reducing speaking anxiety in EFL classes.

A significant effect for the independent variable of overseas experiences was found: The students with overseas experience demonstrated lower anxiety (i.e., higher self-confidence) in speaking English (Matsuda & Gobel, 2004). In this study, it is also mentioned that gender has slight effect on overall general/reading anxieties or subcomponents of both anxieties such as low self-confidence in speaking English. However, a dissenting evidence was also exist for no gender effect on language speaking anxiety in Japanese students (Aida, 1994).

In the literature there are some research findings about reducing anxiety in classroom environment (Karabıyık, 2012). Some of them are related to teachers' managing the class, whereas others arise from classroom environment and pupils. For instance; setting a cheerful classroom atmosphere can also be useful since students that have positive moods are less likely to experience anxiety (Saeidi & Jabbarpour, 2011). Depending on the age level of the students appropriate games, songs and NLP activities integrated into the classroom activities may be useful in this respect (Karabıyık, 2012). In addition to this knowledge about classroom environment, instructors need to be good observers and s/he also recognizes signals of anxiety. Teachers should monitor his/her students cautiously so as to identify their indications and take some precautions about future classes. In that case, teacher's guidance and assistance have crucial effect on students' foreign language learning and foreign language learning setting. In that study, it was also shown that peer support had a very significant effect on diminishing anxiety in foreign language classes. As a result of this study, some extent of anxiety will always exist in foreign language learning setting.

As indicated by Karaca's thesis(2012), anxiety comes out from oneself. "The learner" was the main source of reading/listening anxiety for the students. They were mostly afraid of failure and making mistakes. Half of the learners complained about the manner of error correction and giving feedback. Uninteresting quality, unfamiliarity, and incomprehensibility of the topic of the text also produced reading and listening anxiety among the students. They were also not satisfied with the classroom activities in reading and listening classes (Karaca, 2012). In order to eliminate such problems in classroom settings as well as to condense anxiety of language learners, role play technique and theatre application has been suggested to

be effective tool. Provided that students accept the possible faults in language learning through role playing, their language anxiety is more likely to diminish in foreign language classes (Akalın, 2015). Also, it was found that nine weeks' theatre application helped students lower their speaking anxiety (Zerey, 2008). During the application of theatre to decrease language anxiety, students were supposed to keep a diary throughout nine weeks. Thanks to those submissions, students were able to enhance their self-confidence. In the meantime, students had courage to speak more comfortably in foreign language classes (Zerey, 2008).

Another study about speaking anxiety has concluded that age factor affects language learning anxiety in EFL classes (Özütürk & Hürsen, 2013). The level of English language learners is one of the significant issues about anxiety emergence. In Turkey, university students differ from each other as a consequence of speaking anxiety rate. In that study, it was found that the first year students had lower anxiety compared to the second year students. This difference between two classes can be attributed to heavy work load or curriculum in the second year and background of the students (Özütürk & Hürsen, 2013).

In conclusion, in the review of literature, there have been many studies in order to find reasons and solutions to speaking anxiety in language learning classes. To summarize the history, there has been found many practical ways to defeat speaking anxiety in language learning classes. We support the fact that practicing speaking English and overseas experiences contribute to help one reduce his/her anxiety. Another method to overcome speaking anxiety in language learning classes is to enable students to dramatize in actual English speaking contexts. Role play is also very useful tool which supports students' accuracy and fluency development in language learning classes. Theatre is another valuable device to weaken students' language anxiety. Theatre has a comforting effect on students. Students not only enjoy it but also learn language at the same time. To set a cheerful classroom atmosphere is one of teachers' duties in language learning classes. It supports to reduce speaking anxiety in language learning classes. Boring, long and uninteresting activities may have a negative effect on students in language learning classes. So, students may need some enjoyable and cheerful activities in order to have fun. These kinds of activities lower students' speaking anxiety in language learning classes. Games, songs and art-craft activities are practical instruments to condense speaking anxiety of students in language learning classes. Group work has also positive effect on student's cooperative skills. As a group, they feel more comfortable and relaxed. This brings

them a cool environment to express themselves. Shortly, we can reduce students' speaking anxiety with variety of tools and techniques.

The purpose of our study was to find possible ways to diminish speaking anxiety of college students in language learning classes. To find such ways obviously requires the determination for the effect of some variables such as gender, class level that has provided rather inconsistent results in the literature. To conduct this research, we have used a questionnaire of Horwitz's Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale. According to Horwitz (1990), students attend classes with prejudicial ideas and personal beliefs. These components may have an effect on their language learning process in foreign language speaking classes.

One of the studies conducted about language speaking anxiety, Yim (2014) carried out a research about language speaking anxiety by using Horwitz's Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale. Researcher pointed out that fewer than 15% participants think that their English level is poor. According to the data analysis, the perceived level of English proficiency was identified from the literature review as the best predictor of anxiety, while experience of studying abroad, hours of studying English, and gender, in that order, were reported to influence levels of anxiety significantly (Yim, 2014). In another research, it has been mentioned that gender hardly affects speaking anxiety at Turkish universities (Özütürk & Hürsen, 2013). Obviously, such inconsistent findings in gender need further investigation.

In our research process, Horwitz's Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale was used to examine the effects of variables such as gender, class level, and general point average (GPA). In the history of foreign language, this scale has been used widely by the researchers. Mak (2011) used this scale while he was conducting his research named 'An exploration of speaking-in-class anxiety with Chinese ESL learners'. Atas (2015) used Turkish version of Horwitz's Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale in her study.

In our study, there were 90 participants attending our questionnaire to involve in Abant İzzet Baysal University at English language department. All freshman, sophomore, junior and senior students were taken a place in our study. Our questionnaire items were to measure confidence (or reversely anxiety) of students. Making mistakes, failure and intelligibility of target language were examined to find effect on anxiety in our study. Duration and length of the course, continuous correction of teacher may have an effect on language speaking anxiety. Shortly, we aimed to

identify the reasons of anxiety in language speaking classes and offer some solutions for EFL students to overcome speaking anxiety.

While we are conducting our research, we have embarked from some particular research questions. Those questions are:

- Is gender a decisive factor on language speaking anxiety among the students at Abant İzzet Baysal University?
- Does grade make a difference on anxiety between students at Abant İzzet Baysal University? Are freshmen students more anxious than any other grades?
- Are there distinctive difference between students with higher overall grade point average and students with low overall grade point average at Abant İzzet Baysal University? Or are there significant relationship between grade point average and anxiety?
- What are the possible ways that we can offer to decrease students' language speaking anxiety?

2. Methodology

2.1. Participants' demographic details

Participants were 90 randomly-selected participants 23 freshmen, 20 sophomores, 28 juniors and 19 seniors from English language teaching department at Abant İzzet Baysal University.

2.2. Instrumentation

While we are studying on our research, we have used Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (FLCAS) created by Horwitz and colleagues (1986). This questionnaire consists of 32 items, most of the items (26 items) are positively worded; 6 items were negatively worded in order to function as a crosscheck. To indicate our variables, we have used a column including some information about student at the top of the questionnaire as in Table 1*.

Table 1.

**HORWITZ'S FOREIGN LANGUAGE CLASSROOM ANXIETY
SCALE**

Gender: Female – Male Grade: _____ GANO: _____

While we have been conducting our research, we have used 20. version of SPSS.

2.3. Data Analysis

32 items in our questionnaire's five-point scale: 'never', 'rarely', 'sometimes', 'often' and 'always' as in Table 2**. Aida (1994) notes that principal component analysis with varimax rotation was used because of conceptual simplicity and ease of description (as cited in Mak, 2011). The aim why we have used this method is to diminish data and make interpretation of that data easier. In the current study factor analysis showed that items accounted for 42.66 % of the total variance, which represented one component. Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin measure of sampling adequacy was .87, which was above the expected value of .76. Internal consistency of the scale (Cronbach alpha) was .93.

Table 2. Some examples of Horwitz's Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale

	Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Often	Always
1. I never feel quite sure of myself when I am speaking in English classes.					
2. I am afraid of making mistakes in English classes.					
3. I tremble when I know that I'm going to be called on in language class.					

3. Results

We have 3 different variables from our research. Our data was collected with Horwitz's Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale. We have examined them and got findings by using SPSS programme. Here are the inferences that we get:

3.1. Gender

Our findings showed that gender had a significant effect on anxiety scores, $t(88) = 2.32, p = .02$. Females ($M = 56.14$) had higher scores in anxiety than males ($M = 45.14$). Females were more anxious than males at the department of English language teaching at Abant Izzet Baysal University. According to our observation, compared to females, males were more comfortable while they were filling our questionnaire.

Table 3. Means and Standard Deviations for Gender Effect on Anxiety

Gender	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean	t	p
Female	48	56.15	24.62	3.55	2.32	.02
Male	42	45.14	19.43	2.99		

3.2. Grade or Class Level

One way ANOVA was conducted to examine the effects of class levels on anxiety scores. This analysis showed that class level had a significant effect on anxiety, $F(3, 86) = 4.39, p = 0.005, \eta^2 = 0.13$. Benferroni post test showed that freshmen students ($M = 64.26$) had higher anxiety scores than junior ones ($M = 51.10$), senior ones ($M = 42.92$), and sophomore ones ($M = 46.79$). However, there were no significant differences among junior, senior and sophomores (see Table 4).

Table 4. Means and Standard Deviations for Effects of Class Levels on Anxiety

Class	Mean	Std. Deviation	N
1st(freshmen)	64.26	27.29	23
2nd(sophomore)	51.10	19.67	20
3rd(junior)	42.93	19.63	28
4th(senior)	46.79	18.78	19
Total	51.01	22.91	90

3.3. An interaction between gender and class level on language speaking anxiety

A 2 x 4 ANOVA analysis was conducted to examine the interaction effect between gender and class level on anxiety. This analysis yielded a main effect of gender ($F(1, 82) = 4.67, p = 0.05, \eta^2 = 0.04$) with the higher scores of females over males, class level ($F(3, 82) = 4.73, p = 0.005, \eta^2 = 0.15$) with the higher scores of freshmen over other grades, and interaction effect between these variables ($F(3, 82) = 4.35, p = 0.005, \eta^2 = 0.14$). The interaction effect between gender and class level reflected the fact that females had higher anxiety scores than males in the first and third year of university; however this trend was absent in the second and fourth year (see table 5).

Table 5. Interaction Effect Between Gender and Class Level on Anxiety

Gender	Grade	Mean	Std. Deviation	N
Female	freshmen	76.84	28.08	13
	sophomore	46.50	22.25	10
	junior	51.31	19.31	16
	senior	45.55	11.72	9
	Total	56.15	24.63	48
Male	freshmen	47.90	15.55	10
	sophomore	55.70	16.57	10
	junior	31.75	14.11	12
	senior	47.90	24.09	10
	Total	45.14	19.43	42
Total	freshmen	64.26	27.28	23
	sophomore	51.10	19.67	20
	junior	42.93	19.63	28
	senior	46.79	18.78	19
	Total	51.01	22.91	90

3.4. Overall grade point average

One way ANOVA showed that there were no significant differences among class levels, $F(2, 63) = .002, p = .99$. Correlation analysis indicated that there was a significant negative correlation ($r = -.31, p =$

.01) between GPA and anxiety scores. This means that the students who had higher anxiety were those who had lower GPA. In other words, higher anxiety means that a student has a lower overall grade point average.

4. Discussion

The findings of the current research illuminated the fact that language speaking anxiety are affected by gender and class level. Females had higher anxiety scores than males. This finding suggests that females are more prone to speaking anxiety than males. This is also in line with the previous research finding (Abu-Rabia, 2004; Elkhafafi, 2005; Machida, 2001) but inconsistent with some of others (Aida, 1994; Matsuda & Gobel, 2004). The difference between these findings can be explained from cultural differences. For instance, gender difference was found in Iranian, Turkish and Japanese culture. This means that gender difference might be evident in collectivist culture but not in individualistic one. This explanation need further research that compares gender across different cultures. This difference between female and male in this study can be attributed to the fact that females are more attentive to stimuli in their environment than males. On the other hand, in the view of selectivity hypothesis, males are more likely to pay attention to what is more important in their environment. Such attention differences or overstimulation experienced by females may be one plausible explanation for this effect. Thus teachers should give special attention to these students by giving some explanations, making environment easy-going or comfortable, providing some social or instrumental support.

Another finding of this study was that freshmen students had higher anxiety scores than any other levels. In other words, freshman students have less confidence than the other grades while they are speaking in EFL classes. More than 50% freshman students feel afraid of making mistakes in English classes. Junior, senior, and sophomore students feel more relaxed when they speak in English. Freshman students were more anxious about teacher talk in the classroom. They feel uncomfortable when they do not understand what the teacher is saying. A possible explanation for this might be that they have just attended to Abant Izzet Baysal University and they probably are in adjustment process. For instance, being alone or distant from their family members and maintaining their life by themselves may contribute to the increment of their anxiety levels. Such role change abruptly make their life difficult for freshmen students. Female freshmen suffer from anxiety more than male ones. Thus a special care should be provided to this group. We also found

that junior females had higher anxiety scores than male ones. They may experience anxiety about their life after graduation. Why junior females had higher anxiety than junior males needs a detailed and further investigation. One way to decrease such problem is to provide drama classes. We observed that students had lower language anxiety and felt free while they were performing in rehearsals and on the stage. We can deduce from that, using drama techniques and role plays might help students to diminish their level of language anxiety in EFL classes. There has been conducted a research by Atas (2015) about using drama techniques to reduce language anxiety in EFL classes. She pointed out that drama helped to reduce speaking anxiety in foreign language classes. She collected her data with the help of Horwitz's Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale.

An interesting finding of the current research was that the students who had higher anxiety were those who had lower GPA. Even though such relationship is moderate in degree, one can speculate that anxiety in one specific are related to performance in general ability. This means that some degree of generalization or transition between these areas are possible. Thus studies should consider underlying reasons for such transition between one specific area and one general one and put a light on this issue.

5. Conclusion

We have conducted a research about language anxiety, which was measured by Horwitz's Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale used throughout the history of language in order to examine students' language anxiety, in EFL classes at English language teaching department in Abant İzzet Baysal University. The investigated variables were gender, grade and overall grade point average. We had randomly chosen 90 participants from English language teaching department at Abant İzzet Baysal University to involve in our study. A total of 23 participants were freshmen, 20 students were sophomores, 28 participants were juniors and 19 students were seniors. As a result of our study, we have found out that gender had a significant effect on language anxiety. Compared to males, females have tendency to have higher anxiety. Another variable, grade had a significant effect on language anxiety. Freshmen seem to have anxiety more than any other grades. A significant interaction effect between gender and grade was found in this study, indicating that freshmen and junior females had higher anxiety than their counterparts. As last variable of our study, overall grade point average affected

language anxiety. We have found out that students with higher overall grade point average have less anxiety, especially freshmen students.

6. Recommendation

According to our research, some intervention techniques such as drama and role play activities might be beneficial and help to diminish language anxiety in EFL classes. So we suggest that doing these activities and creating stress-free environment may be helpful in your teaching process.

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