



A Study on Foreign Language Anxiety: The Case of a Gagauzian and Turkish University

*Yabancı Dil Kaygısı Üzerine Bir Çalışma:
Bir Gagavuz ve Türk Üniversitesi Örneği*

Halil KÜÇÜKLER*

Özet

Kaygı, yabancı bir dil öğrenmede önemli bir faktördür. Bazen öğrencinin üretmeye çalıştığı çıktıyı bile engelleyebilir veya etkileyebilir. Bulgular, kaygısı olan öğrencilerin düşük performans sergilediğini, kaygısı olmayan öğrencilerin iyi performans gösterdiğini ve ders sırasında sunulan konuyu kavradığını belirtmektedir. Mevcut araştırmanın amacı, ampirik sonuçlara dayanan kaygı uyandıran faktörleri tespit etmek ve durumun iyileştirilmesi için uygun çözümü bulmaktır. Araştırmanın katılımcıları; 2017-2019 öğretim yılında Türkiye Balıkesir Üniversitesi ile Moldova Komrat Üniversitesi'nde öğrenim gören 506 öğrenciden oluşmaktadır. Bu araştırma için Horwitz (1986) tarafından geliştirilen yabancı dil sınıf kaygısı ölçeği (FLCAS) araç olarak kullanılmıştır. Analizde, anketten elde edilen veriler Sosyal Bilimler İstatistik Paketi (SSPS.17.0) kullanılarak nicel olarak analiz edilmiştir. Maddeler için ortalamalar, yüzdelere, frekanslar ve standart sapmalar hesaplanmıştır. Ölçeğin güvenilirliği, ortalama madde içi korelasyona dayanan bir iç tutarlılık modeli olan Cronbach'ın Alfa Modeli kullanılarak değerlendirilmiştir. Sonuçlar öğrencilerin eğitim gördüğü üniversiteye göre istatistiksel olarak anlamlı bir farklılık göstermemektedir. Bununla birlikte, kadın katılımcıların ortalama puanları erkek katılımcılardan daha yüksektir.

Anahtar kelimeler: *Kaygı, yabancı dil kaygısı, yabancı dil öğrenimi, Yabancı dil öğretimi, ikinci dil.*

*Dr., Balıkesir Üniversitesi, Yabancı Diller Yüksekokulu, hkucukler2@gmail.com, ORCID ID: orcid.org/0000-0002-7674-540X.

Abstract

Anxiety is a substantial factor in learning a foreign language. Sometimes it even can block or affect the output that the student tries to produce. The findings state that students with anxiety demonstrate poor performance while students with no anxiety perform well and comprehend the material presented during the lesson. The aim of the current research is to detect anxiety-provoking factors based on empirical results and to find the proper solution for situation improvement. The participants of the study consisted of 506 students studying at Balıkesir University in Turkey, Komrat University in Moldova, in the 2017-2019 academic year. An instrument foreign language classroom anxiety scale (FLCAS) by Horwitz (1986) has served as a tool for the research. In the analysis, the data obtained from the questionnaire were analysed quantitatively by using by the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SSPS.17.0). Means, percentages, frequencies and standard deviations were calculated for the items. The reliability of the scale was assessed using Cronbach's Alpha Model, a model of internal consistency based on the average inter-item correlation. The results do not show any statistically significant difference compared to the university where students are studying. However, the average scores of female participants are higher than male participants.

Keywords: *Anxiety, Foreign Language Anxiety, Foreign Language Learning, Foreign Language Teaching, Second Language.*

The importance of foreign language, its expansion, especially of English, has increased the necessity of excellent communication skills and language performance. However, not everyone takes English learning easy. Some students can express a feeling of stress, nervousness, and anxiety, which often create the so-called mind block (Hashemi, 2011). Anxiety perceived intuitively by many language students can affect or influence language learning negatively. Horwitz (2001) finds foreign language anxiety (FLA) as one of the most highly examined variables in psychology and education (Horwitz, 2001). Anxiety associated with foreign or second language learning and communication has long been in the focus of second language researchers. It has been investigated in the broader context of individual learner differences potentially responsible for differential success at language learning since the 1970s (Toth, 2010). However, there are still open questions about anxiety. Toth (2010) is still disputing the question, whether anxiety about foreign language learning and communication declines as proficiency increases, and whether proficiency is a primary factor in determining the anxiety level.

The global social context is built under the shade of the lingual interaction of different people. However, this social context dramatically depends on the natural language an individual has within the society. Learning a new language

has been tentatively simple and hard, depending on intellectual determination. Notably, anxiety has been a vital issue when addressing the notion of understanding a foreign language. This individual apprehension, uneasiness, and worry in learning the second language have rendered most students and individuals the perception of second language being hard, such as learning how to speak English (Ewald, 2007). However, learning English has become one of the significant challenges for the students as they express stress, nervousness, and anxiety while learning English (Khudobina et al., 2019).

Foreign Language Anxiety \ Language Learning Anxiety

Learning a second language has been influenced by the personal anxiety a person has; thus, we are going to understand the factor contributing to the own anxiety on learning the foreign language and the measures towards overcoming. Researches about anxiety started from the 1980s by Krashen (1981), who argues that the so-called affective factors like anxiety, motivation, and self-confidence, determine the grade of success in English. Horwitz (2001) proceeded intensive research in the anxiety. Some studies found a negative correlation between foreign language performance and anxiety. Hu & Wang (2014) state that, when anxiety is presented in the classroom, the performance will be deficient, as it affects the self-esteem, confidence, and communicative competence. This feeling makes students shy and blocked, and they get afraid of making mistakes both in speaking, reading as well as in writing (Hu & Wang, 2014). With time researchers started to adopt a situation-specific definition of anxiety depending on the situation and environments the anxiety occurs (MacIntyre & Gardner, 1991)

Heron (1992) divides anxiety into three types:

- Acceptance anxiety that discovers the fear, if the group will accept the person or his knowledge.
- Orientation anxiety reflecting the fear of a person, whether he or she understands, and what it is going about.
- Performance anxiety or fear about their own ability to perform language as others in the class do.

Teimouri et al. (2019) underline the so-called foreign language classroom anxiety (FLCA), which can be defined as a complex of feelings, bias, beliefs related to the classroom arising from the process of the language learning.

Thus, it can be stated that the term anxiety refers to the subjective feeling of tension, apprehension, nervousness, and worry associated with an arousal of the autonomic nervous system (He, 2018). Hu (2018, s. 143-162) states that the relationship between anxiety and performance has U-form, i.e., when

anxiety is low, performance is also low; when anxiety is optimal, performance is high. Furthermore, when anxiety is exceptionally high, performance gets deteriorated (He, 2018). Xiang (2004) states that learning anxiety harms students in many ways, both indirectly through worry and self-doubt, and directly by reducing class participation and creating the avoidance of the language.

Arnold (1999, s. 269-279) claims that it is not always clear how foreign-language anxiety comes into being. For some people, it may be a certain case with the wrong answer in the class. For others, it may be a case correlating with factors unconnected with the language class itself. Heron (1989) suggests searching for roots of anxiety in the past; it could be a personal hurt, particularly of the childhood that had been denied for a long time.

Chan et al. (2012) claim that the situation can be improved by a teacher who can reduce anxiety by enabling students to deal with language anxiety more effectively and avoid traumatic experiences in language learning.

Anxiety can have a negative impact on the mind leading to mind block. Foreign Language Anxiety (FLA) is considered as one of the most highly examined variables in education and psychology. The researchers find a negative correlation between anxiety and language performance. They also argue that factors like self-confidence, motivation, and anxiety can largely determine the level of success in the language (Kráľová, 2016).

According to Heron, Anxiety can be categorized into three types, such as acceptance anxiety, which reflects the fear of the person either his knowledge will be accepted or not. Anxiety-related to orientation, which determines the understanding level and fear. Performance anxiety is the fear of the ability to perform the language. Another form of anxiety is classroom anxiety, which springs from feelings of biases and beliefs which arise from the process of learning the language. The article has critically analyzed the anxiety as the feeling of tension and nervousness, which arouses the autonomic nervous system.

Definitions of Second language and Foreign Language Anxiety

- The second language refers to the other language used in a given country other than the native language
- Foreign Language Anxiety represents a distinct complex of self-perception, beliefs, feelings, and behaviors related to the classroom language learning arising from the uniqueness of the language learning process (Horwitz et al., 1986).

METHODOLOGY

Participants

This study was carried based on the assessment of the existing literature. The participants of the study consisted of 506 students studying at Balıkesir University and Komrat University in the 2017-2019 academic year. The students who volunteered to participate in the research completed the data collection on the internet. 58.3% (n = 295) of the participants were female and 42% (n = 211) were male. The 50.7% (n = 257) of the participants were in Balıkesir University, 49.2% (n = 249) in Komrat University. When the departments are considered, the participants of 28.6% (n = 145) study in the English Department, the 71.3% (n = 361) of the participants' study in the other departments.

Instruments

The existing studies were selected from the identified online databases based on well-defined selection criteria. Data obtained from the obtained studies were subjected to meta-analysis. The study only included primary studies. Only the full text and free to access studies were selected. The primary studies that were considered included the surveys, intervention studies, comparison studies, and prospective studies. Only the primary studies that were conducted based on a well-documented methodology that shows limited errors, validity, and reliability issues were considered. The review papers and unpublished research were excluded from the study. Only the papers that were written in English were considered. The studies were selected regardless of the time of publication. This review considered the studies that examined the effect of anxiety on learners of English as the second language. The review also selected studies with adult participants of different gender, ethnicity, social-economic status, and nationality. The first questionnaire called the Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (FLCAS) developed by Horwitz et al. (1986) served as a tool for the research. It consists of a 33-item survey to measure writing apprehension towards and the teaching of writing. A five-point Likert-type scale, (1) Never or almost never true of me, (2) Usually not true of me, (3) Somewhat true of me, (4) Usually true of me, (5) Always or almost always true of me.

Data analysis

The Data obtained from the questionnaire were analysed quantitatively by using by the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS.17.0). Means, percentages, frequencies and standard deviations were calculated for the items.

RESULTS AND ANALYSIS

A case conducted to the students at Balıkesir University in Turkey and Komrat University in Gagauzia shows that several factors contribute to the anxiety of understanding the foreign language. How can we overcome this individual perception in learning a second language?

Fallah (2017) finds that the results from the research show that anxiety is considered as a vital issue while learning a new language. Within the studies overviewed, based on the answers of the participants, the ANOVA test was carried out in order to evaluate the FLA level and to discover possible dependencies on such variables as gender, knowledge level, personal characteristics, and others. The reliability α value makes 0.92, where the crucial value is 0.7. Thus, the results can be accepted as reliable and accurate.

Gender, Nationality, and FLA

The studies analyzed in the current work emphasized the interviews of students in Turkey and Moldova, who were focused on English as a foreign language. The students participated in the online questionnaire on the volunteer base. The data protection law and research ethics were the priority and taken into account.

Category	Gender	Students	
		N	%
Gender	Female	295	58.3
	Male	211	42
	Total	506	100
University	Balıkesir University	257	50.7
	Komrat University	249	49.2
	Total	506	100
Branch	English	145	28.6
	Other	361	71.3
	Total	506	100

Table 1. The number and gender of participants who answered the questionnaires.

First, the analysis of determining the state of anxiety and general evaluation of the level of different kinds of anxiety were performed. Descriptive analyses, similarly also presented in the study by Shabani (2012),

indicated that participants had a feeling of anxiety, which was higher than other kinds of anxiety.

Deviation	M	SD	Mode	Median	Z _{skewness}	Z _{kurtosis}
Anxiety	92,45	19,92	79.00	92.00	1,71	-.84

Table 2. Normality tests.

The average, mode, median, skewness, and kurtosis values of the variables that are the basis of the study were calculated. If the mean, mode, and median values are equal in a frequency distribution to a series, it can be said that the data is symmetrically distributed around the central trend measures. Z scores of skewness and kurtosis coefficients are between ± 1.96 . These values show that the distribution is close to normal distribution (Field, 2016). For this reason, parametric tests can be applied.

	α Value
Foreign Language Anxiety	.922

Table 3. Cronbach α Coefficient of the scale.

The reliability coefficients of the scale and sub-dimensions used in the research were calculated. It was concluded that the α coefficients of the validity of the scale were over .70. Therefore, the questionnaires were reliable (Büyüköztürk, 2006; Tabachnick& Fidell, 2013).

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Deviation
Participants scores	506	1,01	3,29	2,89	0,55

Table 4. The scores of the participants.

It should be mentioned that many studies found no correlation between gender and FLA were detected.

	Gender	N	\bar{X}	Sd	$Sh_{\bar{X}}$	t Test		
						T	Df	P
Anxiety	Female	295	93,88	19,69	1,14	1,91	504	,056
	Male	215	90,45	20,13	1,39			

Table 5. The anxiety t test of the gender of the participants.

University students participating in the research do not show a statistically significant difference concerning their gender regarding their foreign language learning. Nevertheless, in our experimental study and the study by Shabani (2012) state, females are more anxious than males in terms of each kind of language anxiety.

	Gender	N	\bar{X}	Sd	$Sh_{\bar{X}}$	t Test		
						T	Df	P
Anxiety	Female	154	94,74	20,70	1,67	1,483	255	0,139
	Male	103	90,79	21,30	2,10			

Table 6. The anxiety t test of the gender of the participants of Balıkesir University.

The anxiety t test of the gender of the participants of Balıkesir University does not show a statistically significant difference.

	Gender	N	\bar{X}	Sd	$Sh_{\bar{X}}$	t Test		
						T	Df	P
Anxiety	Female	144	91,08	18,88	1,57	-,647	247	,518
	Male	105	92,64	18,69	1,82			

Table 7. The anxiety t test of the gender of the participants of Komrat University.

The anxiety t test of the gender of the participants of Komrat University does not show a statistically significant difference.

	Branch	N	\bar{X}	Sd	$Sh_{\bar{X}}$	t Test		
						T	df	P
Anxiety	English	145	91,08	18,81	1,65	-,978	504	,329
	Other	361	93,00	20,15	1,04			

Table 8. The anxiety t test of the branches of the participants.

The further result demonstrates that there is also no definite correlation between the branch they learn (English or another language) and the level of Anxiety: Separate research and statistical evaluation were performed in order to find out possible connections between the level of anxiety and the university, where students study. The anxiety of foreign language students, who participated in the research, does not show a statistically significant difference according to the branch they are studying. However, the average scores of the participants studying in other departments are higher than the participants studying in the foreign languages department.

	University	N	\bar{X}	Sd	$Sh_{\bar{X}}$	t Test		
						T	Df	P
Anxiety	Balikesir	257	93,16	20,99	1,31	,801	504	,423
	Komrat	249	91,73	18,78	1,19			

Table 9. The statistical results of the anxiety of the participants.

The results do not show any statistically significant difference compared to the university where students are studying. The anxiety of students who participated in the study from both universities about learning foreign languages does not show a statistically significant difference according to their gender. However, the average scores of female participants are higher than male participants.

Contributing to individual Anxiety in Learning Foreign Language

The evaluation of the results of Anxiety and possible Anxiety producing factors based on the studies by Shabani (2012), Xu (2011), Kral'ova & Soradova (2015) brought results that the prima factor producing anxiety was the fear of failing classes or negative evaluation. Secondly, when students were not prepared for the teacher's questions, they also felt anxiety. Thirdly Shabani (2012), Xu (2011), Kral'ova & Soradova (2015), and many others point out the factor of forgetting vocabulary.

Anxiety producing factors	Mean
Fear of failing classes (negative evaluation)	3,29
Being not prepared for teacher's question	3,16
Feeling overwhelmed by the number of rules having to learn to speak a foreign language.	3, 11
Fear of forgetting things to know	3,05
I get upset when I do not understand what the teacher is correcting.	3.04
Thinking that the other students are better at languages	3.05
My heart pounding when I am going to be called on in language class.	2,96
Feel very self-conscious about speaking the foreign language in front of other students.	2.88
It would not bother me at all to take more foreign language classes.	2.24

Table 10. The results of the statistical anxiety-producing factors.

Significantly, self-perception of understanding a foreign language much depends on personal conformity towards learning the second language (Tallon, 2009). The compliance of own speech and the targeted language in learning a foreign language builds an interpersonal comfort on willingness to learn a new language. According to the students learning in Balikesir and Gagauzian, over 115 (22.7%) students agree that they can never be sure of speaking a foreign language, with 185 (36.7%) students disagreeing on worrying making mistakes in speaking a foreign language. Typically, this is an inner perception that influences personal anxiety towards learning a foreign language. Therefore, speech anxiety is one of the critical factors in learning a second language.

Individual comfort and freedom are other critical factors that contribute to the anxiety to learn and understand a foreign language. Most students tend to find speaking a foreign language around people is a hard thing, especial with peers. Over 161 (31.8%) students find discomfort while talking around other students. The nervousness built by an individual tends to affect personal thoughts adversely; thus, resulting in a negative perception of the urge to learn a foreign language.

Personal panic of negative analysis and failure on learning a foreign language is another critical cause of own anxiety towards foreign language

(Marwan, 2016). As evident most students fear failing exams involving the learning of the foreign language, with over 195 (38.5%) students agreeing on failing their foreign language classes that are correlative to over 140 (27.7%) students getting upset on attending the foreign language classes. Consequently, the anxiety of negative analysis substantially creates fear in learning a foreign language.

Anxiety and personal attitude play a crucial role in understanding a foreign language. Notably, a negative attitude influences individual performance towards learning a foreign language. According to data collected on Balikesir and Gagauzian, over 140 (27.7%) students find themselves inferior on learning a new language; similarly, over 215 (42.5%) students tend to have pressure in preparing to attend the class in learning the foreign language (Elaldi, 2016). The attitude of the students has negatively influenced the tentative anxiety of learning a foreign language in most students.

Based on answers of the participants most of them suffer from anxiety due to aspects of the teaching-learning process, namely, from the language itself (they consider it difficult), from the necessity to speak in front of other classmates, about the language class, about the behavior of peers, about the competition with other students, about speaking a foreign language in general, etc. (Xu, 2011). Besides, students often report about the fear of making a mistake. As a result, they get very nervous during the lesson and consequently are really corrected by the teacher or peers. In general, many students reported the strict and formal atmosphere in the classroom are significantly contributing to the Anxiety (Kral'ova&Soradova, 2015).

Kral'ova&Soradova (2015) underline the role of the teacher in constructing FLA, as he (she) is a person who can regulate the atmosphere in the class, identify the sign of anxiety in advance and improve it. Teachers' attitudes, favoritism are factors that cause FLA.

Hashemi (2011) claims that learners get more anxious and stressed in the class environments following the traditional learning systems where the learners have to drill or repeat some tiresome tasks like machines continually (e.g., audio-lingual language teaching method).

Another FLA-producing factor discovered by Hashemi (2011) is a cultural difference. The less acquainted with another culture a person is, the more difficult it will be for him (her) to lean it what also produces Anxiety (Hashemi, 2011). This factor is influential in the Asian context (Jones, 2004)

The current research provides an overview of core problematics connected with foreign language anxiety. Based on the literature overview and results of

research, the primary anxiety-provoking factors are environmental and cultural constraints (Teimouri et al., 2011). Anxiety as a form of self-belief can be a crucial factor affecting learner's motivation.

The most significant adverse effect of language learning anxiety comes from the fear of course grades and during language tests (Teimouri et al., 2011). Brown, Plonsky, & Teimouri (2018) even criticize the grading for its lack of systematicity and high grade of subjectivisms and stress the necessity to proceed with more objective measures while evaluating language proficiency.

Anxiety can be high in output activities such as speaking, writing, and listening (Nakata, 2006, s. 135-158) specific difficulties were observed during listening tasks. Xu (2011) claims that listeners with a higher level of self-confidence adopt more effective listening tactics and demonstrate better performance.

Types of Anxiety

Based on the results of the evaluation of questionnaires, researchers distinct between trait, state, and situation-specific Anxiety (Hashemi, 2014). Trait anxiety means characteristic of the person, i.e., a person just tends to be anxious. State anxiety is a response to the provoking stimulus or situation, i.e., exam, important test (Horwitz, 2001). Furthermore, situation/specific anxiety arises during special events, during public speaking, etc. (Ellis, 1994, s. 142:156).

Many studies have been conducted to investigate the effect of anxiety on learning. Scholars also divide FLA depending on its effect on harmful and helpful Anxiety (Hu & Wang, 2014). The majority of studies (Hu & Wang, 2014; Jones, 2004; Horwitz, 1986; Oteir & Al-Otaibi, 2019) confirm the negative effect of foreign language anxiety on language performance. Anxiety harms learners and affects their perception of language (Oteir & Al-Otaibi, 2019). However, there are also positive effects of FLA, as facilitating anxiety sometimes helps competitively to indeed perform well in second language learning (Oteir & Al-Otaibi, 2019).

It should be mentioned that some studies have discovered some contrary facts. Toth (2010) points out that there is no dependence on anxiety on language proficiency. Thus, there is no significant difference between the anxiety level of the beginner, intermediate, and advanced foreign language student.

Solution of FLA problem through teaching approach

The need to overcome personal fear is a crucial process in enhancing the perfect vocalization of a foreign language. One of the best solutions is embracing the overall mistakes as part of the learning journey. This solution includes fighting the negative attitude; failing is part of learning and dealing away with an inferior in speaking and learning the new language (Marwan, 2008). Arguably, to win a battle requires an inner force from an individual, likewise to learning a new language. We only have to deal with our inner fear, attitude, and emotion through accepting the mistakes.

Developing a positivism mind is an essential tool of learning; developing a positive mind in learning the language; outstandingly, positivism is an essential factor in overcoming the anxiety of understanding a foreign language. Thus, these solutions will significantly help fight the drawback of anxiety towards learning a second language. Dewaele (2017) finds that class discussion on the anxiety issues can also address the situation strategically as it allows the students to disclose their issues.

The best solution to the problematics of FLA is the teacher's performance. Hashemi (2010) even provides 8 suggestions for the foreign language teacher, which are aimed at the reduction of the anxiety and active involvement of students into the learning process:

- First of all, it is crucial to create a friendly trustful atmosphere in the group,
- Teachers should be careful to and to encourage those students who are afraid to make a mistake, or feel blocked during communication.
- Tanveer (2007) recommends sometimes performing discussions in class about the feeling of anxiety.
- Basic knowledge about the culture or ethnic background of students can also help teachers to identify the anxiety behavior in time (Hashemi, 2010)

To summarize, the tension of learning a foreign language has been influenced by several factors within a particular context. The study from Balikesir and Gagauzian shows that attitude, individual speech, and negative evaluation influences personal anxiety in learning a foreign language. Conversely, possessing a positive attitude, and embracing mistakes are vital solutions. Therefore, foreign language anxiety has been a critical factor for most students.

CONCLUSION

Learning a foreign language can be termed as a lifelong commitment, and indeed, those who find it difficult to adjust with the foreign language, they fall into the trap of anxiety. Anxiety then plays a significant role in influencing the overall learning process of the language. Instructor's role cannot be denied as they are the one who needs to find the most efficient approaches during the learning of foreign learning. They should consider the requirement of the foreign language learner and thus should make the necessary changes while teaching a foreign language. They should ensure that the language is more enjoyable, effective, and less frustrating while learning. Shabani (2012), taking into account the paramount role instructors play in reducing the amount of anxiety among learners, recommends, besides, to employ various psychological strategies in the classroom.

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