

Foreign Language Learning Anxiety in Turkey: The Case of Aydın Province

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Abstract

Learning a new language is significant in every aspect, and currently, people are increasingly aware of its significance. In language learning, various aspects affect individuals, and one of the most significant is related to human psychology. The goal is to apply the factors that positively influence language learning to the learning process. Personality traits such as empathy, introversion, and self-esteem (Brown, 1994) are some of the emotional variables that are related to the individual. According to the literature, language learning anxiety is one of the most important factors leading to this problem. For this reason, It is the main focus of this study.

Learning a foreign language is a complex process involving many factors, requiring not only the acquisition of vocabulary and grammatical structures, but also the development of communication skills. While some students approach foreign language learning with confidence, others find this process threatening, moreover, they may develop excessive anxiety in the foreign language classroom. Anxiety is a psychological phenomenon that has a major impact on foreign language learning. In order to improve the foreign language learning process, it is of great importance to determine the anxiety level of students and reduce the existing anxiety. In this study, the level of foreign language learning anxiety among high school students in Aydın Province was investigated. The data collection process of the study was conducted with 385 students attending German classes at Anatolian high schools in Aydın province. The data were collected using the Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety (FLCAS) scale, which can be statistically analyzed to determine the anxiety level of the students. The obtained data were analyzed using the SPSS 25.0 programme, and the results of the analysis show that the anxiety of the students towards learning a foreign language in German classes is moderate. At the same time, it was found that the level of anxiety varies according to demographic characteristics.

Keywords: Foreign Language, Anxiety, Foreign Language Anxiety, German as a Foreign Language, High School Students.

Introduction

Language acquisition is affected by several factors, among which human psychology is one of the most significant. Consequently, several studies have been carried out to identify the factors involved in learning a new language (Ely, 1986; Gardner & MacIntyre, 1993; Horwitz et al., 1986; Schumann, 1999; Young, 1990). All of the studies share a common focus. The aim is to apply the effects of factors which influence language learning to the learning process. Emotional variables of individuals comprise personality traits like empathy, introversion, and self-esteem (Brown, 1994). Research that examines the relationship between an individual's emotional variables and language learning typically cites specific personality traits such as risk-taking, extroversion, self-esteem, and anxiety. These traits can have favorable and unfavorable impacts on the language learning process. Anxiety can be one of the characteristics that are effective (Balemir, 2009).

[Krashen \(1982\)](#) stated that anxiety, as a component of the learner's emotional filter, can impede the process of learning and acquiring a language. Recent studies in this field have concentrated primarily on anxiety related to studying a foreign language, describing it as a sensation of tension and fear when speaking, listening, or learning a particular language ([Balkaya et al., 2020](#); [Gardner & MacIntyre, 1993](#); [Oflaz, 2019](#); [Şahin Topbaş & Koçak, 2021](#); [Yılmaz & Sakarya Maden, 2016](#); [Zengin & Şahin Topbaş, 2023](#)). In 1986, Horwitz, Horwitz, and Cope were among the first researchers to consider foreign language anxiety as a unique type of anxiety, separate from other kinds of anxiety. Foreign language anxiety relates to the feelings and behaviors that students experience when learning a language in the classroom, as per Horwitz, Horwitz, and Cope's research in 1986. People usually experience anxiety while speaking a foreign language ([Horwitz et al., 1986](#); [Phillips, 1992](#); [Saltan, 2003](#)). Factors such as speaking spontaneously in class, fear of making mistakes, classmates' and teachers' attitudes, and lack of self-confidence may influence anxiety. According to [Horwitz et al. \(1986\)](#), foreign language anxiety stems from three interrelated performance fears: communication anxiety, test anxiety, and fear of negative evaluation. The aim of the study was to investigate the level of foreign language learning anxiety among high school students in Aydın Province. The data collected from the sample group quantitatively provides sources of foreign language anxiety to the literature.

Methodology

In this part of the study, the aim of which was to examine the foreign language learning anxiety levels of high school students in Aydın describes the methodology used and the hypotheses of the study.

Data Collection Tools

The Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (FLCAS) developed by [Horwitz et al. \(1986\)](#) was used as data collection tool. This scale was translated into Turkish by Aydınin and has been widely used in Turkish literature. In this study, the version of the above scale used by [Ulucan Kurt \(2021\)](#) in his master study to measure foreign language anxiety

was used. This scale is a 32-item scale that has been adapted to measure foreign language anxiety. Since the reliability of this scale is Cronbach's alpha coefficient of .93 and it can be applied in Turkish language, the usability of the scale increases.

Data Collection

The survey was conducted using Google Forms in Anatolian high schools located in Aydın Province. The survey enrolled 385 students. The tool was administered with the assistance of the researcher's colleagues. The questionnaire was sent by each teacher to his or her class based on the instruction by the researcher regarding the significant aspects of the study and the questionnaire.

Research Group

The study's participants were 385 Anatolian high school students from Aydın province during the 2022-2023 spring semester. Random sampling was employed. The sample consisted of 200 female and 185 male students between 14 and 17 years of age. All participants were studying German as their second foreign language.

Research Hypotheses

Six hypotheses were formulated based on the literature as part of the study. The following are the hypotheses:

1. Students studying German in high schools of Aydın province are apprehensive about learning foreign languages in the classroom.
2. There is a significant difference in the level of anxiety about learning a foreign language between genders.
3. The level of anxiety for learning a language differs significantly across different grade levels.
4. The level of anxiety related to learning foreign languages varies significantly based on the perceived level of English as a foreign language.
5. There is a noticeable difference in foreign language anxiety levels among students depending on the educational level attained by their mother.
6. The level of anxiety for learning a foreign language varies significantly based on the educational level of the students' father.

Data Analysis

The quantitative data collected was compiled and analyzed using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) version 25.0. The collected data was analyzed using descriptive and inferential statistics.

For data analysis, descriptive statistics, inferential statistics, and correlation analyses were employed. Descriptive analyses of the study utilized the mean and standard deviation.

Inferential analyses were performed using independent samples t-tests to examine the effects of gender, grade level, perceived level of English ability, and economic status on fear of foreign language learning.

Prior to analyzing parametric tests such as the t-test, certain statistical assumptions were evaluated to determine if the study data was suitable for this type of analysis. These assumptions comprised evaluating whether the data had a normal distribution and whether they were interval or proportional data. As the values ranged from -2 to +2 and the Levene's test analysis ($p=0.94 > .05$) did not indicate any statistically significant difference, it is evident that the data is normally distributed and the assumption of equal variances is met (George & Mallery, 2003).

Validating and Verifying the Reliability of the Data

Validity and reliability studies for the data collection instruments used in the study were conducted in this process. The Cronbach's α value was utilized to ensure study reliability. The α -coefficient used to ascertain reliability was interpreted based on the ranges provided by Cevik and Akgül (2005).

If $\alpha < 0.40$, the scale is not reliable,

If $0.40 \leq \alpha < 0.60$, the reliability of the scale is low,

If $0.60 \leq \alpha < 0.80$, the scale is reliable,

If $0.80 \leq \alpha < 1.00$, the scale is very reliable.

Table 1 Reliability Coefficient of FLCAS

FLCAS Foreign Language Anxiety Questionnaire	Cronbach's Alpha 0.93
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The study's reliability results showed that the Cronbach's alpha value for the "Anxiety in Foreign Language Teaching" scale was $\alpha=0.93$. This result suggests that the scale is highly reliable.

Results

These results include descriptive and inferential analysis, below are the results of correlation analysis alongside the mean values of the items. Factor analysis is an interdependence technique that defines the fundamental structure of variables within the analysis (Hair et al., 2010). The analysis is used in two primary applications: This study employs "Exploratory factor analysis" to determine the fundamental factor structures of newly discovered scale items, scales translated from other languages, or questions related to a specific sample. "Confirmatory factor analysis" is another technique implemented in this study to examine the accuracy of factor-analyzed items that were previously determined (Suhr, 2006). This study utilized exploratory factor analysis. Table 2 displays the results of the factor analysis KMO and Bartlett tests.

Table 2 KMO and Bartlett Test

Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Test (KMO)	0,906
Bartlett Test	Ki-Kare 13508,502
	Sd 587
	p 0,000

The suitability of the gathered data for factor analysis was examined using the Bartlett Sphericity test and the Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) suitability measure. Based on a p-value of <0.05 ($p=0.00$) from the Bartlett Sphericity Test, it was concluded that there was a significant correlation among the variables, indicating that the data was appropriate for factor analysis (Hair et al., 2010). According to relevant literature, KMO values below 0.50 are considered 'poor', values between 0.70-0.80 are deemed 'good', those between 0.80-0.90 are considered 'very good', and values between 0.90-1.00 are labeled as 'excellent' (Seçer, 2015). Therefore, it can be stated that the sample size of the study is ideal for factor analysis.

Table 3 Confirmatory Factor Analysis

Item	Factor loading	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Agree	Strongly agree
I am not confident when I speak in German classes.	,86					
I am afraid of making mistakes in German class.	,74					
When I know it's my turn to speak in German class, I die of excitement.	,83					
It scares me not to understand what my teacher is saying in German class.	,75					
I wish I had more German lessons per week.	,72					
During German lessons I find myself thinking about other things that have nothing to do with the lesson.	,89					
I think that other students are better than me in German lessons.	,77					
I feel anxious during the exams of German lessons.	,82					
I panic when I have to speak without preparation in German lessons.	,84					
Failing in German lessons worries me.	,71					
I can understand why some people are worried about foreign language lessons.	,75					
Sometimes I get so excited in German lessons that I forget even what I know.	,72					
I get bored answering the questions asked in German lessons voluntarily.	,82					
I am excited to speak German with native German speakers.	,88					
Not understanding what mistakes, the teacher is correcting worries me.	,73					
In German lessons, I get excited in class, even if I am well prepared beforehand.	,75					
I don't want to go to German lessons.	,81					
I don't feel confident when I speak in German classes.	,83					
My German teacher tries to correct every mistake I make.	,69					
When it is my turn in German class, I feel my heart beating fast.	,81					
The more I study for German exams, the more confused I get.	,78					
I feel that I have to prepare myself very well for German lessons.	,76					
I always think that other students speak German better than me.	,75					
I feel very nervous speaking German in front of other students.	,79					
German lessons go so fast that I am afraid of not being able to keep up with the class.	,81					
When I speak in German classes, I get bored and confused.	,73					
I feel very uncomfortable and insecure when I attend German classes.	,77					
I panic when I cannot understand every word my German teacher says.	,80					
I worry that the number of rules I have to learn in order to speak German is too many.	,88					
I worry that other students will laugh at me when I speak German.	,89					
I feel uncomfortable using German in the presence of native German speakers.	,73					

I get excited when my German teacher asks questions to which I have not prepared the answer in advance.	,71					
Total explained variance: %78.52						

*Items with negative connotations were reverse coded, and the means were recalculated.

The scale has already been utilized multiple times in Turkey based on previous literature. A confirmatory factor analysis was performed to measure the validity of the scale used in this study. Confirmatory factor analysis is a method used to assess the relevance of scales that have been previously developed and used. In order to interpret the results of confirmatory factor analysis, it is required that the factor loadings of the items are above 0.50. As the factor loading of the items approaches 1, their explanatory power strengthens (Yaşlıoğlu, 2017).

The study reveals that the total explained variance of all variables and statements is 78.52%. Thus, these statements account for 78.52% of the variance in the variables and the model.

Table 4 Presents the Level of Apprehension towards Acquiring a Foreign Language

Medium anxiety about learning a foreign language
58.26

The study's questionnaire examines Anatolian high school students' level of learning anxiety in relation to acquiring a foreign language. This scale employed a 32-item questionnaire. The questionnaire uses a 5-point Likert scale. The scale's scores range from 18 to 90. Students who score above 72 present high levels of anxiety regarding foreign language acquisition. Those who score between 54 and 72 present moderate levels of anxiety, whereas those who score less than 54 show low levels of anxiety about learning a foreign language. Descriptive statistical analysis was employed to determine the level of anxiety in learning foreign languages. Table 4 shows that students from high schools in Aydin province have a moderate level of anxiety while learning a foreign language.

Table 5 On Gender Differences in Foreign Language Anxiety Findings

Gender	N	Mean	Std. Dev.	t value	Df	p (sig. 2-tailed.)
Male	185	47.10	16.72	4.26	381	.367
Female	200	53.03	15.37			

The research aims to determine the extent of the difference between genders in terms of foreign language learning anxiety. The research analyzed the data using the t-test for interpretative statistics. The data obtained is presented in Table 5.

Table 6 ANOVA Test Results by Class Level

Class level	N	Mean	Std. Dev.	F value	p (sig. 2-tailed.)
9	104	62.11	.621	4.12	.000
10	94	57.32	.413		
11	91	40.12	.389		
12	96	43.15	.402		

The anxiety level about foreign language learning varies significantly depending on the grade level of the students, as indicated in the table. The analysis of the average values reveals that ninth-graders experience more anxiety about foreign language learning. One of the main reasons for this situation is the fact that ninth grade is usually the first year in which they learn a second foreign language.

Table 7 Students' Perceived Level of Proficiency in English

Language level	N	Mean	Std. Dev.	F value	P (sig. 2-tailed.)
Beginner level	179	72.10	.684	3.99	.000
Intermediate level	153	59.25	.482		
Advance level	53	20.33	.433		

Table 7 shows that anxiety levels towards learning a foreign language change substantially depending on the students' language level in the German language course. After analyzing the average values, it can be concluded that anxiety towards learning a new language tends to decrease as the perceived English language level increases.

Table 8 shows that there was no significant correlation between the education level of the mothers and the foreign language anxiety level of the students.

Table 9 indicates that there was no significant correlation between the education level of the father and foreign language anxiety among the students.

Table 8 Fear of Learning a Foreign Language as a Function of the Mother's Level of Education

Educational level	N	Mean	Std. Dev.	F value	P (sig.2-tailed.)
Primary education	104	62.11	62.11	4.12	.568
Secondary education	94	57.32	57.32		
Bachelor's degree	91	40.12	40.12		
Postgraduate education	96	43.15	43.15		

Table 9 Fear of Learning a Foreign Language as a Function of the Father's Level of Education

Educational level	N	Mean	Std. Dev.	F value	P (sig.2-tailed.)
Primary education	64	71.13	.513	3.11	.328
Secondary education	126	46.21	.215		
Bachelor's degree	110	37.63	.276		
Postgraduate education	85	41.26	.301		

Discussion

The study focuses on high school students' anxiety concerning foreign language learning in Aydin Province. The study aimed to investigate the relationship between anxiety and various factors,

including students' anxiety levels and the correlation between high school students' anxiety about foreign language learning and their demographic data. Table 10 summarizes the study's hypotheses and results.

Table 10 Summary of Research Results

Hypothesis	Conclusion
H1: High school students studying German in Aydin province feel scared to study foreign languages inside the classroom.	Accepted
H2: There is a significant difference in the level of anxiety about learning a foreign language between genders.	Rejected
H3: There is a notable difference in how anxious students are about learning a language depending on their grade level.	Accepted
H4: The amount of anxiety experienced while speaking a foreign language varies significantly depending on how well the speaker perceives their English language skills.	Accepted
H5: There is a noticeable difference in foreign language anxiety levels among students depending on the educational level attained by their mothers.	Rejected
H6: The level of anxiety that students experience when learning a foreign language significantly varies based on their father's level of education.	Rejected

Regarding the first research question, it was found that students learning German in a school context mostly experience a moderate level of anxiety. The research results demonstrate that high school students experience a moderate level of anxiety in learning a foreign language. Moreover, according to the study, students tend to perceive others as better than themselves and feel excessively self-conscious while trying to communicate in a foreign language.

Regarding the second research question, the study concluded that there is no significant correlation between students' level of language learning anxiety and gender.

Regarding the third research question, the study has demonstrated that there exists a noteworthy correlation between students' degree of anxiety towards acquiring the language and their level of

study. This outcome suggests that apprehension towards foreign language acquisition is prevalently noticed in students who have recently commenced their schooling and those pursuing German language courses.

According to the study findings, students who view themselves as successful in English classes exhibit lower levels of foreign language anxiety towards German than their counterparts who consider themselves unsuccessful.

For the fifth and sixth research questions, we found no significant relationship between students' level of anxiety towards language learning and their parents' educational background.

Conclusion and Suggestions

Although there was no significant correlation between the anxiety levels of students and their gender or their parents' educational status, their grade level and the English proficiency they perceive were found to have a significant correlation with anxiety levels. The level of proficiency that students have in a foreign language is one of the factors that affects their anxiety levels. The outcome of this study indicates that an increase in students' proficiency levels decreases their anxiety about learning a foreign language.

The research results have led to some suggestions for foreign language teachers:

1. The causes of students' foreign language anxiety should be investigated and appropriate activities should be planned to reduce the anxiety.
2. Students with language anxiety should be encouraged by their teachers to seek psychological counseling and support from the school.
3. For students who are new to foreign language classes, activities should be planned to make the class enjoyable and to reduce their anxiety.
4. Since students begin their foreign language acquisition with English and their perceived success in English affects their anxiety about other foreign languages, students' attitudes and approaches to English should also be monitored.
5. Academics in the field of foreign language teaching and psychological counseling should encourage students to conduct new research and expand their research capacity to reduce foreign language anxiety.

6. It is believed that foreign language teachers can benefit from courses about the causes, prevention, and management of foreign language anxiety in training programs.
7. It is assumed that it would be useful to study foreign language anxiety separately for the four basic skills: reading, writing, listening, and speaking.

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