

FOREIGN LANGUAGE ANXIETY: LISTENING AND SPEAKING

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ÖZET

Bu çalışma öğrencilerin sınıf içi dinleme ve konuşma etkinliklerinde yaşadıkları yabancı dil kaygısını araştırdı. Daha önce yürütülen birçok çalışmada ya dinleme ya da konuşma becerisi yabancı dil kaygısı bakımından ele alınmış fakat her ikisi bir arada araştırılmamıştır. Ayrıca bazı çalışmalar Horwitz ve arkadaşlarınca 1986 yılında geliştirilen anketi kullanmıştır. Bu çalışmada ise altı sorudan oluşan bir anket Türkiye'deki bir üniversitesinin İngiliz Dili ve Edebiyatı Bölümüne devam eden 38 öğrenciye verildi. Anketin ilk iki sorusu Likert-ölçeğine uygun diğer dört soru ise açık uçlu soru şeklindeydi. Sorulara verilen yanıtlar öğrencilerin iletişim tutukluğu ve öğretmen ve arkadaşlarının olumsuz değerlendirmeleri korkusundan dolayı konuşma etkinliklerinde rahat olmadıklarını belirtti. Dinleme etkinliklerine gelince sınıf içinde kullanılan video ve teyp kasetlerindeki konuşmaları anlayamama güçlükleri vardı. Çalışmanın bu bulguları yabancı dil kaygısının hedef dilde üretimin yanı sıra anlamayı bloke ettiği için öğrencilerde dinleme ve konuşma becerilerinin gelişmesini engellediğini gösterdi.

Anahtar sözcükler: yabancı dil kaygısı, dinleme, konuşma

ABSTRACT

This study investigated the foreign language anxiety learners experience in the classroom listening and speaking activities. In many early studies either listening or speaking skill has been examined in terms of foreign language anxiety but both of them have not been looked at. In addition, some studies have used the questionnaire developed by Horwitz et al. in 1986. In this study a questionnaire consisting of six questions were given to thirty-eight learners of English attending the Department of English Language and Literature at a university in Turkey. The first two questions of the questionnaire were in the

form of Likert-type scaling whereas the other four were open-ended. The responses provided for the questions indicated that learners were not comfortable in speaking activities owing to communication apprehension and the fear of negative evaluations of their teachers and peers. As to the listening activities they had the difficulty of understanding the conversations in the tapes and the videos used in the classroom. These findings of the study showed that foreign language anxiety is a hindrance in developing listening and speaking skills in learners as it blocks their comprehension as well as production in the target language.

Key words: foreign language anxiety, listening, speaking

1. INTRODUCTION

Foreign language (FL) anxiety has been an area of interest since the 1980s. In an early study, Horwitz, Horwitz and Cope (1986) argued that FL anxiety is a situation-specific anxiety arising from the classroom setting. They assert that it should be considered on its own in the education process because FL learning differs from other learning experiences due to its complex structure as regards learners' self perceptions, beliefs, feelings and behaviours related to classroom language learning (Horwitz et al. 1986).

Language anxiety, which is defined as 'the feeling of tension and apprehension specially associated with second language contexts including speaking, listening and learning', (MacIntyre and Gardner, 1989: 2) involves three anxieties associated with first language use and everyday life: communication apprehension, fear of negative evaluation, and test anxiety (Horwitz et al. 1986).

Communication apprehension refers to 'a type of shyness characterized by fear of or anxiety about communicating with people' (McCroskey 1977: 26). According to Horwitz et al. (1986: 30), anxiety does not present difficulty to young learners as much as it does to adults since they have not developed 'self-perception' as adults have. Adults perceive themselves 'as reasonably intelligent, socially adept individuals', and hence the mismatch between their mature thoughts and their immature foreign or second language proficiency gives rise to self-consciousness and anxiety in some individuals. Pointing out this aspect of communication apprehension, Gregersen and Horwitz (2002: 562) added that being unable to express oneself fully and to understand another person's utterances can lead to feelings of frustration and apprehension.

Fear of negative evaluation is the second anxiety associated with FL learning. It refers to the anxiety of others' evaluation (Watson and Friend, 1969: 448). Language learning contains a process of acquiring linguistic rules or

participating in communicative activities as well as a process in which learners are subjected to constant evaluation from the teacher and the other learners in the classroom. If the learners are unsure of themselves and what they are saying, they will feel that they are not able to make the proper social impression. As a result they will minimize their interaction with other learners and participate less in activities. They may even skip class.

The third anxiety is test anxiety related to performance anxiety which stems from a fear of failure in an academic setting (Horwitz et al., 1986). The unfamiliar test items, the format of the test, different materials and question types with which learners are not familiar are generally believed to create anxiety reactions. Anxious learners usually know the correct answers but write the wrong ones in tests due to carelessness and/or nervousness.

In discussion the issue of anxiety MacIntyre and Gardner (1989) point out that learners do not begin the language learning experience with language anxiety but rather form it as a result of some negative experiences they had in the learning process and add that once it has developed, language anxiety can affect learners' performance and future learning.

1.1 ANXIETY IN SPEECH AND LISTENING

Using the Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (FLCAS) they themselves developed, Horwitz et al. (1986) found that anxiety is typically connected with listening and speaking. Anxious learners are good at responding to drills or giving prepared speeches, yet speaking spontaneously in class poses problems for them. They may also have some problems in discriminating sounds and structures or in catching their meaning. The results of a clinical experience with FL learners in university classes and at the Learning Skills Center (LSC) at the University of Texas supported that finding. Horwitz and Young (1991: 29, cited in Öztürk, 2002: 12-13) reported:

The clinical experience suggested several discrete problems caused by anxiety and illustrated poignantly how these problems can interfere with language learning. Principally, counsellors find that anxiety centers on the two basic task requirements of foreign language learning: listening and speaking. Difficulty in speaking in class is probably the most frequently cited concern of the anxious foreign language students seeking help at the LSC. Students often report that they feel fairly comfortable responding to a drill or delivering prepared speeches in their foreign language

class but tend to "freeze" in a role-play situation. Anxious students may also have difficulty in grasping the content of a target language message. Many LSC clients claim that they have little or no idea of -what the teacher is saying in extended target language utterances.

Wheless et al. (1987, cited in Wilcox 2002: 3), after suggesting that students with high listening anxiety may have primary irrational fears or anxiety, mention that receiver apprehension, that is listening anxiety, 'is an affective response when deficient cognitive processing abilities inhibit the achievement of goals or the performance of behaviors required by a given environment'.

To explain FL learners' difficulty in speaking and listening, Krashen (1980) argued that the extraction of meaning is the primary process in the development of a second language. However, anxiety impedes this through activating an affective filter which is a part of the internal processing system that subconsciously screens input based on 'affect', as named by psychologists; thus it makes the individual unreceptive to language input and blocks the language acquisition progress. Anxious students are also inhibited when attempting to utilize any second language fluency.

In sum, current theories and research in foreign/second language acquisition have exhibited that the problem of anxiety and the accompanying irrational beliefs about language learning represent serious impediments to the development of language fluency as well as to comprehension and production.

1.2 RECENT STUDIES IN SPEAKING AND LISTENING ANXIETY

A number of recent studies have investigated learners' anxiety concerning the factors of target language use, perfectionism, motivation, willingness to communicate (WTC), and stability in speaking and listening. Levine (2003) examined the relationships between target language use and student anxiety about target language (TL) use. An internet-based questionnaire was devised to measure target language and first language use in university-level FL classes. Six hundred FL learners and 163 FL instructors took part in this study that dealt with both groups' 'beliefs about the importance of TL use, and beliefs about student anxiety experienced through TL use, also with regard to specific classroom contexts' (Levine, 2003: 347). The results showed that amounts of TL use changed according to the interlocutors' groups and communicating contents and there was no positive relationship between TL use and TL-use anxiety. In relation to the second finding of the study, Levine (2003: 355)

expressed the view that 'greater TL use may not translate into greater anxiety for many learners'.

Gregersen and Horwitz (2002) attempted to shed light on the relationship between FL anxiety and perfectionism. Anxious and non-anxious language learners' interactions were videotaped and then learners were asked to make comments about their own oral performance. In view of the learners' reactions to their actual oral performance and analysis of the audiotapes for instances of perfectionism, the researchers found that anxious learners have high standards for their English performance, a tendency towards procrastination, great worry over teachers' and peers' evaluation and an overestimation of their errors as regards the number and seriousness. The results also revealed that there is a link between language anxiety and perfectionism. Anxious language learners and perfectionists may have common characteristics which includes the potential for making language learning unpleasant and less successful for them.

MacIntyre et al. (2002) were concerned with the effects of sex and age on anxiety aside from perceived competence, L2 motivation and WTC. In the study, they make a cross-sectional investigation of second language communication among junior high school French immersion students by administering a questionnaire including eight scales. Considering anxiety, they found that L2 anxiety is higher than L1 anxiety at all grade levels and boys' levels of anxiety is higher than girls' in grade 9 but that there is no significant difference between grade 8 and grade 9 students in terms of L2 WTC and L2 perceived competence. They suggested that anxiety reduction might lead to increased L2 WTC and also increased perceived competence.

Consistent with this view, Yashima (2002) reported that a lower level of anxiety and perception of L2 communication competence increased the level of WTC. The results obtained from the questionnaire assessing communication anxiety in English in addition to some other variables such as motivational intensity, desire to learn English, WTC in English, and perceived communication competence in English showed that a motivated learner tends to perceive that her or his competence is high and that s/he has a low level of anxiety compared with a less-motivated person.

Rodríguez and Abreu (2003) addressed the issue of whether the levels of general FL anxiety in the participants differed across English and French. They collected their data by using the FLCAS produced by Horwitz et al. (1986). The participants of the study were preservice teachers from two western universities in Venezuela who were studying these two foreign languages as their majors. The researchers explained, in the light of the results, that participants' general FL anxiety did not differ across English and French

significantly. However, the participants had higher levels of French anxiety as they had not received as much training in French as in English before entering college.

Relying on the early studies related to receiver apprehension, Wilcox (2002) dealt with listening anxiety and carried out an empirical study to find out if some skills training would reduce receiver apprehension. The results displayed that receiver apprehension was significantly reduced for the students receiving listening and note-taking skills training through the use of interactive video instruction.

Elkhafafi (2005) investigated the effect of general foreign language learning anxiety on students' achievement in an Arabic course beside the effect of listening anxiety on students' achievement in listening comprehension. The analysis of the data coming from two measures of anxiety and a background questionnaire given to 233 postsecondary students of Arabic as a foreign language showed that foreign language anxiety and listening anxiety have distinguishable constructs which are distinct from each other; furthermore, there were significant negative correlations among foreign language anxiety, listening anxiety and selected demographic variables.

In a recent study, Kondo and Ying-Ling (2004) made a classification of strategies used by students to cope with the anxiety they experience in English language classrooms. They examined the impact of anxiety level on strategy use, as well. These researchers identified five strategy categories involving 70 basic tactics for coping with language anxiety: *preparation* (e.g., checking dictionary, studying hard), *relaxation* (e.g., trying to relax, closing eyes), *positive thinking* (e.g., trying to be confident, trying to enjoy the tension), *peer seeking* (e.g., talking with friends around me, asking other students if they understand the class) and *resignation* (e.g., giving up, accepting the situation). They did not find a relationship between language anxiety and frequencies of strategy use.

2. STUDY DESIGN

A common complaint among the lecturers is that learners do not understand what they hear and are reluctant to participate in class activities, particularly speaking activities. The reason why they behave indifferent towards the classroom listening and speaking activities was not obvious. This study was carried out to figure out whether language anxiety in listening and speaking might be the reason to explain this reluctance. In addition, the study aimed to bring learners' problems relating listening and speaking into light.

The literature on language anxiety demonstrates that many researchers have replicated the study conducted by Horwitz et al. (1986) by using a scale they developed or their own questionnaire composed of statements related to the factors under investigation. Contrary to the previous studies, a questionnaire consisting of two questions in the form of Likert-type scaling and four open-ended questions was developed by adapting the learner questionnaires presented in Furneaux and Rignall (1993) and also White and McGovern (1993) and given to the subjects.

2.2 PARTICIPANTS

The learners taking part in the study were thirty-eight Turkish learners. They were English major students attending the preparatory course¹ offered by the Department of English Language and Literature at a Turkish University. Learners taking the preparatory course have been included in the study since this course is oriented towards skills development and grammar whereas the other courses taught in the department center around English literature.

In the course students are asked to listen to tapes including conversations and dialogues in English about various topics. There are both native speakers and non-native speakers in these tapes. Beside tapes, learners watch videos which are composed of news reports, short dialogues among different characters, and also films in English. Speaking activities consist of pair and group activities in which learners are supposed to swap information, exchange ideas on an issue or ask and answer questions. Some of the speaking activities like puzzles, games, answering questions, discussions require the learners' individual contribution, as well.

2.3 MATERIAL

The questionnaire mentioned above consisted of six questions. The first two questions aimed to find out the feelings learners experience when speaking English and also how much practice they have recently had at speaking and listening to English outside the classroom. Their feelings and the amount of the practice were important in diagnosing the reasons for their problems. The positive and negative feelings about their speaking in the target language most likely have an effect on their later performance. In addition, the amount of practice they had would indicate whether learners have had enough opportunity to improve their speaking and listening skills outside the classroom. These two questions were in the form of Likert-type scaling with three levels (i.e., none, a little and a lot). The second question had a follow-up open-ended part assessing the easy and difficult parts of the classroom activities listed in the preceding part of the question.

The third question was related to their opinion about whether or not being able to comprehend and produce English sentences was important. If their answer was positive, they would also indicate for what sort of purposes they were important. The fourth question asked their opinion was about the importance of oral communication in their education. The purpose of this question was to measure learners' attitude toward speaking and listening in the target language with reference to their formal education which would last four more years after the preparatory course.

The fifth question dealt with what they do before, at the moment, and after speaking and listening tasks. That is, how they prepare themselves to the tasks, how they carry them out and what they concentrate on when the task is over. Specifying the difficulties the learners have in listening and speaking tasks was necessary to develop some strategies learners can use to overcome these difficulties. The sixth question focused on this issue.

3. RESULTS

The frequency counts of the responses given to the first two questions were found for each scale ranging from *none* to *a lot* and then the distribution of the raw scores was converted into percentage scores to present the complete picture in connection with the feelings and the practice they have had recently. The results of both raw scores and percentage scores for Questions 1 and 2 are presented in Tables I and II, respectively.

Table I. The results of Question 1 (*How do you feel when speaking in English?*)

As seen in Table I, learners mostly feel negatively excited (i.e., 65 percent for a lot and 32 percent for a little) and anxious (i.e., 39 percent for a lot and 45 percent for a little). Although they marked the scale 'a little' more than 'a lot', a high percentage score exists for confused (i.e., 58 percent for a little and 24 percent for a lot), shy (i.e., 49 percent for a little and 32 percent for a lot) and puzzled (i.e. 52 percent for a little and 24 percent for a lot), as well. Almost one third of the learners do not feel successful and half of the learners are not relaxed at all. A striking aspect of the results is that learners showed a tendency to choose the scale 'a little' more than the other two scales. Nevertheless, the results were important since they displayed that learners are negatively excited when speaking in English and hence they may not want to speak in the classroom.

Table II presents the results of the second question measuring how much practice learners have had in listening and speaking activities. The results showed that half or more than half of the learners have recently had no practice in conversation in a group, listening to radio channels, making a presentation and talking to native speakers. Some learners have had a little practice in conversation with another person, watching films in their original language and listening to English songs, all whose percentages were over 50. For the rating 'a lot', except for listening to the BBC, The Voice of America, etc. (i.e., 46 percent), the results ranged between 0 and 24 percent. These results imply that learners do not practice enough and some learners found listening to songs in English (i.e., 42 percent), informal discussion with their friends (i.e., 24 percent) and watching films in their original language (i.e., 24 percent) easy. As to the difficult activities, the results displayed that more than half of the learners think that talking to the native speakers of the target language and tourists speaking in English is a difficult practice. Learners reported that listening to English songs is easy but listening to the radio channels in English is difficult (i.e. 24 percent). Another difficult activity was conversation in a group (i.e. 26 percent). The other activities were either easy or difficult for the others.

Table II. The results of Question 2 (*How much practice have you, recently, had at speaking and listening in English outside the language classroom?*)

In the analysis of the other questions, the common trend among the answers was identified and then similar answers were grouped together. This was necessary since the questions were open-ended and learners commented on various aspects; to present all of them one by one would be impossible. However, some quotations taken from their own writings are given in the discussion of the results. Regarding the common points, the distributions of the answers provided to open-ended questions follow.

The third question investigated the importance of the comprehension and production of English. It was concerned with this importance in relation with the purposes it can be used for. The purposes presented by learners are: to be a good English teacher (i.e., 40 percent), to communicate with the speakers of the target language (i.e., 38 percent), to have the opportunity of improving speaking skills (i.e., 13 percent), to have further education (i.e., 11 percent), to express thoughts (i.e., 5 percent) and to use in every part of life (i.e., 3 percent). Besides these, five learners wrote that it is an international language and therefore it should be known.

Table III. The results of Question 3 (*Do you think it will be important to be able to comprehend English sentences and to communicate in English well orally? And if so, for what sort of purposes?*)

The reluctance of some learners to participate in speaking and listening activities was connected with the idea that oral communication is not necessary in their education since they will not use it in the following years. They expressed the view that they attend the department of English literature and they will take formal exams as a part of their assessment, but will not be evaluated according to their production. The fourth question asking their thoughts about the importance of oral communication in their education was included to account for whether this belief was common among learners. The results obtained from this question are given in Table IV.

Table IV. The results of Question 4. (*Do you think oral communication is important in your education?*)

Most of the learners had positive views about the importance and necessity of oral communication. Forty-two percent of the learners indicated that oral communication is necessary to practice and improve language skills. Some of the learners argued that writing is not enough; opposed to the view expressed by six learners that writing is important in their education, they claimed they should speak English properly. The other learners approached the issue from a different point of view by putting forward some other reasons to justify the importance of oral communication: to communicate with people (i.e., 16 percent), to overcome some problems such as excitement, being shy, etc. (i.e., 8 percent), to understand the subjects taught in the classes (i.e., 8 percent), and to be ready to their future teaching career (i.e., 5 percent). Three learners wrote that knowing only grammar rules is not enough.

As to the fifth question, the responses had a wide range as learners noted their feelings as well as the things they did or concentrated on. The results are grouped in accordance with the progress of the task, that is before, at the moment of, and after the task:

Table V. The results of Question 5. (*What do you do or what do you concentrate on when you are given a listening and/or speaking task?*)

According to the results presented in Table V, learners generally search for some words and expressions they can use in the task (i.e., 44 percent), and also they concentrate on the listening activity (i.e., 32 percent) or plan the sentences they can produce (i.e., 32 percent) before the task. The other three responses are related to their feelings. Twenty-one percent of the learners experience the

feeling of excitement from the fear of making mistakes or not speaking fluently. The second common psychological feeling experienced by learners is excitement (i.e., 18 percent). Only one learner has the feeling of failure before listening task.

While carrying out the speaking task, learners emphasised that they pay attention to grammar rules (i.e., 34 percent), use the fixed expressions taught in speaking classes (i.e., 24 percent), carry out the task as it is planned (i.e., 11 percent), select words carefully (i.e., 8 percent) and finally translate sentences planned from Turkish into English (i.e., 3 percent). The negative effect of excitement is pointed out in relation with sentence construction (i.e., 29 percent), as it leads learners to produce incorrect sentences. The explanations made about listening activities are concerned with taking notes (i.e., 24 percent) and repeating the listening material by oneself (i.e., 5 percent). Losing concentration and missing some parts of the listening material are some learners' problems (i.e., 13 percent), too.

Table VI. The results of Question 5. (*What do you do or what do you concentrate on when you are given a listening and/or speaking task?*)

After completing the listening and/or speaking tasks, learners do various things. Many learners concentrate on their mistakes taking the feedback given by teachers into account; if the number of mistakes is high, they feel upset (i.e., 60 percent). On the other hand, others feel relieved from the pressure of the speaking task (i.e., 34 percent). Twenty-nine percent of the learners noted that they write the sentences and go through the expressions introduced in the class, and eleven percent focused on the grammatical structures after the task. Some complained that they remember few things when the listening task is over. Two learners put the notes together following the listening task, and one learner was sad because of not having a large vocabulary repertoire.

Table VII. The results of Question 5. (*What do you do or what do you concentrate on when you are given a listening and/or speaking task?*)

The main concern of Question 6 was the difficulties learners had in listening and/or speaking tasks. Learners put forward lack of vocabulary as the most frequent problem they encounter in speaking activities (i.e., 58 percent). The other problems are listed as not being able to produce the planned sentences and lack of grammatical competence, (i.e., 24 percent and 13 percent, respectively). Learners also indicated that they tremble due to fear of making mistakes (i.e., 21 percent) and they make mistakes if they have not decided the sentences they would produce in advance (i.e., 11 percent) in these activities.

Table VIII. The results of Question 6. (i.e. *What difficulties do you have in listening and/or speaking tasks?*)

Their difficulties in listening tasks were the rapid conversations involved in the tapes. Fifty-six percent of the learners wrote that conversations are fast so they cannot catch everything in the tapes. The second difficulty is related to the pronunciations of the speakers from other language backgrounds (i.e., 24 percent). Some learners expressed their hearing difficulties whereas others indicated that they cannot concentrate on the subject and/or have not made practice related to listening skills before. Two learners do not remember the subject of the listening tasks unless they take some notes.

4. DISCUSSION

Having analysed the responses given by the learners, it was realized, as a general trend, that learners expressed their anxieties and difficulties in speaking more than those in listening. They put emphasis on speaking as a communication activity and accept that it is necessary in their education, though a few learners have the opposite view. They also emphasize improving their language skills such as practicing in the target language, understanding the subjects, and overcoming their anxiety-related problems.

Since the study was designed to assess learners' feelings and thoughts in relation with listening and speaking activities by means of open-ended questions, their exact responses to the questions can give insight into the issue of the language anxiety they experience. In fact, learners expressed their feelings, worries and problems as clearly as possible in the comments they made about the easy and difficult parts of the target activities. As presented in the extracts taken from learners' responses to the questions, some learners think that listening to songs in English and watching films in their original language are easy whereas talking to native speakers is a thorny issue as it causes anxiety, negative excitement, and the fear of making mistakes:

Listening the songs in English, conversation in a group or talking with my friend are easy for me, because I feel myself self-confident and relaxed. The others are difficult. Conversation with another person is exciting. Making a presentation to a group of friends is the same; I feel shy and inadequate. (Student 3)

Watching film in their original language is easy because you understand what they say using the

contextual clues. Conversation in a group is the most difficult as I am shy I don't want to talk in front of others. I forget what I know and don't want to participate in the activity. I want to finish my part as soon as possible. (Student 6)

Sometimes communicating with native speakers is difficult since you don't understand their pronunciation or know the meaning of a word produced. You aren't able to give a response to their utterances because of lack of knowledge. (Student 7)

Talking to native speakers is very difficult. I get excited and feel anxious by the fear of making mistakes. (Student 29)

These comments imply that learners have communication apprehension, that is they are not comfortable in talking in front of others. Gregersen and Horwitz (2002: 562) write that 'the inability to express oneself fully or to understand what another person says can easily lead to frustration and apprehension given that the apprehensive communicator is aware that complete communication is not possible and may be troubled by this prospect.'

These sentences also show that learners are aware of the fact that their contribution to classroom activities are assessed by their peers and the teachers and this disturbs them very much. Learners' concern about their teachers' and classmates' evaluation and its negative effect on their performance have been indicated in Horwitz et al.'s study (1986) as well. In light of earlier research, Gregersen and Horwitz (2002: 562-563) explain this case as in the following:

People who are highly concerned about the impressions that others form of them tend to behave in ways that minimize the possibility of unfavorable evaluations. Like communication-anxious individuals, people who fear negative evaluation rarely initiate conversation and interact minimally. Language students who experience this anxiety tend to sit passively in the classroom, withdraw from activities that could increase their language skills, may even avoid class entirely.

The comments presented above bring into light the item ‘negatively excited’, which is marked a great deal by learners while indicating their feelings about speaking English. These also make the marking related to the practice they recently had clear. They listen to English songs and watch films in their original language a little or a lot because they find them easy but do not talk to native speakers or tourists in the target language because they have the fear of not communicating properly. The first two listening activities are related to comprehension but the following activity, that is talking to native speakers or tourists is related to production. It is obvious that learners do not want to speak in the target language in order not to be negatively evaluated. However, listening English songs and watching films in the original language do not carry such a risk.

Although learners are not eager to speak English in front of other people, they do believe that comprehending English sentences and communicating orally is necessary. They justify their importance as follows:

It is very important because if we can't understand we can't speak as well. I want to be an English teacher, so speaking and understanding English sentences are very important for me. (Student 1)

English is the language of communication. Lots of people use this. One can know grammar very well but if he doesn't know how to tell his problems and wishes, it is no use to learn English. (Student 38)

If we succeed in these subjects, we'll make use of them in every part of our life because it's an international language. (Student 19)

Learners think that speaking English well is necessary because English is a part of their life when they consider their future occupation, that is being a teacher of English after their graduation. Furthermore, several learners indicate that English is the language of communication or an international language and is used in every part of life. To find out the influence of international posture and intercultural contact situations on willingness to communicate, Yashima (2002: 62) has examined the issue and reported that ‘attitude toward intercultural communication or international interest directly influenced WTC in the second language.’

According to the answers given to the fourth question, focusing on the importance of oral communication in their education, learners believe that they

can improve their language skills and communicate with people speaking the target language if they communicate well orally. The following two extracts exemplify learners' view about its importance:

I think it is very important in my education, because we can't use this language we learn if we can't speak it even though we know all the grammar rules of it. (Student 19)

It is no good knowing grammar rules without speaking English. In order to communicate with foreign people, I have to speak English. However, writing English is easier than speaking in my opinion. Because while writing I can think for a long time but while speaking I have to be fluent. (Student 29)

Having emphasised the necessity of speaking English, they argue that grammatical competence will not be enough to use the target language. Nevertheless, student 29 added that writing English is easier than speaking it as one can have more time to compose his ideas.

As to the whole process of carrying out listening and speaking activities, learners note their feelings frankly and generally point out their excitement, their feeling of failure and the pressure it puts on their production as well as the strategies they use to complete the activity in their responses. The following extracts from their explanations display these feelings for each section of the listening and speaking activities:

Before the tasks:

First I try to plan what I'm going to say and take some notes about the things I can say. I try to remember suitable words and fixed expressions I can use in the task. (Student 3)

I feel very anxious and excited because I don't believe that I can express myself very well. (Student 19)

I prepare myself for a listening activity but I'm very excited. Therefore, I miss very important sections in speaking and listening activities. (Student 22)

I feel anxious about whether I'll understand the conversation in the listening task. I don't trust myself

and feel nervous and excited. I always think that I'll make mistakes. (Student 30)

I feel excited and I'm afraid of saying something wrong. I think my classmates will laugh at me. I decide what to say and which words I should use. (Student 34)

One again, learners state that they are anxious and excited before the tasks and have the fear of not expressing themselves well, making mistakes or not understanding the listening task. As regards common strategies employed by the learners, selecting the appropriate expressions comes first in the speaking tasks and planning the message they would convey is the second. They try to concentrate on the tasks in the listening activities, even though it is very difficult because of being nervous and excited.

While carrying out the tasks:

While speaking I forget what I would say because of excitement and I produce the sentences springing to my mind. (Student 14)

Sometimes I think that the speaker speaks too quickly and so I can't understand. There may be a problem related to the tape as I comprehend the speakers in face to face communication. In speaking activities I try to monitor my speech and try not to make grammar mistakes. I use fixed expressions, as well. (Student 32)

I often feel incompetent but I still do something. Sometimes I feel excited and finish my conversation without expressing all my thoughts. (Student 34)

Learners wrote that they plan their sentences and decide on fixed expressions they can use, but while speaking they forget and produce their sentences spontaneously. They also monitor their own sentences to reduce the number of grammatically incorrect sentences. As expressed by Student 34, learners have the feeling of incompetence during the task and complete their conversation by stating some of their thoughts, but not all of them.

After the tasks:

When the speaking activity finishes I take a deep breath, but I'm ashamed of myself because of the mistakes I made. Sometimes I have difficulty in

constructing even easy sentences due to excitement and I think that everybody in the classroom realized that I was excited. (Student 6)

After the tasks I go through my sentences to see whether I had many mistakes. I find them by comparing my sentences with the teacher's sentences. I note them not to make the same mistakes. (Student 8)

If the activities go well, I feel relaxed. I think that I can do it easily and gain confidence, but if I make mistakes I feel upset (Student 35)

Learners' responses in connection with what they do after finishing the tasks indicate that they are quite relaxed when they complete the speaking tasks, but at the same time they worry about their mistakes. They take some notes and go through their notes to find their mistakes. Their overconcern with their mistakes reveals that learners have not realized that language learning cannot occur without making mistakes. Yet, they gain confidence and fulfill their psychological satisfaction if they are successful in speaking activities.

In terms of the basic problems that speaking and listening activities pose on learners, lack of vocabulary is the most frequent one. Learners recognize that they do not know the words they should use in their sentences and they should catch in the tape conversations and this results in their feeling inadequate and excited. In addition, some learners acknowledge that they have not had listening activities during their high school education. Therefore they do not understand or miss some expressions in the listening activities:

I sometimes have difficulty in listening. If I miss a word I can't attend the following part. I don't understand because of the accent of the speakers, too. In speaking I'm afraid of making mistakes and hence I forget what I planned to say. (Student 14)

I miss some expressions while I'm listening the tasks and I feel very excited while I am speaking. But the main reason of these failures is that we didn't do such exercises before. We didn't take any listening course. We only studied grammar. (Student 19)

I'm not good at listening because of not doing listening activities in high school. While speaking,

sometimes I can't find any word to express my feeling due to lack of vocabulary. (S29)

In sum, although the comparison of this study with the previous studies investigating language anxiety is impossible in accordance with the design and the variables included, as this study does not measure specific factors causing anxiety but attempts to find out the learners' difficulties in speaking and listening activities, the findings of the study are crucial as it implies that anxiety learners experience during listening and speaking activities may have a negative effect on their language development. It brings the problems learners face into light and provides evidence for the necessity of developing some strategies to diminish anxiety-causing factors in the classroom language learning.

5. LIMITATIONS

Some limitations of the study must be mentioned. Participants were from only one university and their proficiency level was intermediate considering the results of the proficiency test administered at the beginning of the term. Therefore the findings of the study cannot be generalized to the whole of Turkish learners of English.

The explanations made about the outcomes of the study are tentative because this study was not designed to identify some other factors such as motivation, aptitude and previous language learning experiences, which might affect learners' anxiety. Further studies can consider all or some of these factors as variables having an impact on anxiety.

6. CONCLUSIONS

The results of this study show that language anxiety is an important impediment in learners' enhancement of speaking and listening skills. Most of the learners experience high anxiety and it blocks their comprehension and production in the target language. Various reasons cause this anxiety and some of them may be listed as lack of practice during their high school education, the negative effect of both teacher and peer observation and evaluation, and feeling inadequate and incompetent due to not having a large enough vocabulary repertoire and full grammatical mastery as well as not being able to pronounce the words correctly.

In view of the study some pedagogical implications can be drawn. In order to reduce the level of communication apprehension in language classes a relax classroom atmosphere should be created and learners should be provided with the support and help they need in learning the new language. As expressed by Gregersen and Horwitz (2002: 569-570), learners 'need to understand that the

classroom is not merely for demonstrating knowledge and skill, but also for gaining it, and that errors are a normal and acceptable part of everyone's language learning experience'. Therefore, lecturers should emphasize that learning and improvement as a result of articulation and participation in classroom activities are more important than perfect performance. Thus learners might overcome their anxiety and develop positive attitudes towards the classroom applications. Gregersen and Horwitz (2002: 569-570) also suggest that: all learners should 'be reminded of the value of controlling their emotional state when speaking the target language'. By this way they can get rid of high anxiety they experience during language production.

NOTES

¹ The learners entering the department are administered a test measuring their level of English proficiency and if they obtain sixty and over from this test comprising grammar, vocabulary and reading comprehension sections, they attend the first year; otherwise they have to take the preparatory course designed to help learners to improve their general proficiency in English.

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APPENDIX

Read the following questions carefully and answer them. Put a cross (i.e. X) into the relevant box while answering the first two questions. The others are open-ended, you will write your answer.

Q1. How do you feel when speaking in English?

| | None | A little | A lot |
|------------|------|----------|-------|
| Anxious | | | |
| Great | | | |
| Excited | | | |
| Successful | | | |
| Confused | | | |
| Nervous | | | |
| Shy | | | |
| Impatient | | | |
| Relaxed | | | |
| Puzzled | | | |

| | | | |
|-------|--|--|--|
| Upset | | | |
|-------|--|--|--|

Q2 . How much practice have you, recently, had at speaking and listening in English outside the language classroom?

| | None | A little | A lot |
|--|------|----------|-------|
| Conversation (with another person) | | | |
| Conversation (in a group) | | | |
| Informal discussion with your friends | | | |
| Listening to the BBC, The Voice of America, etc. | | | |
| Listening to songs in English | | | |
| Watching films in their original language | | | |
| Making a presentation to a group of friends | | | |
| Talking to native speakers of the target language or tourists speaking English | | | |

Which of these items are easy or difficult? And why?

Q3. Do you think to be able to comprehend English sentences and to communicate in English well orally are important? And if so, for what sort of purposes?

Q4. Do you think oral communication is important in your education?

Q5. What do you do or what do you concentrate on when you are given a listening and/or speaking task?

a. Before you carry out the task

b. While you are carrying out the task?

c. When you have finished the task?

Q6. What difficulties do you have in listening and/or speaking tasks?

Table I. The results of Question 1 (*How do you feel when speaking in English?*)

| | None | % | A little | % | A lot | % |
|--------------------|------|----|----------|----|-------|----|
| Anxious | 6 | 16 | 17 | 45 | 15 | 39 |
| Great | 9 | 28 | 16 | 48 | 8 | 24 |
| Negatively Excited | 1 | 3 | 12 | 32 | 25 | 65 |
| Successful | 11 | 30 | 22 | 59 | 4 | 11 |
| Confused | 7 | 18 | 22 | 58 | 9 | 24 |
| Nervous | 19 | 51 | 17 | 46 | 1 | 3 |
| Shy | 7 | 19 | 18 | 49 | 12 | 32 |
| Impatient | 18 | 50 | 12 | 33 | 6 | 17 |
| Relaxed | 19 | 50 | 14 | 37 | 5 | 13 |
| Puzzled | 9 | 24 | 19 | 52 | 9 | 24 |
| Upset | 17 | 46 | 11 | 30 | 9 | 24 |

Table II. The results of Question 2 (How much practice have you, recently, had at speaking and listening in English outside the language classroom?)

| | None | % | A little | % | A lot | % |
|--|------|----|----------|----|-------|----|
| Conversation (with another person) | 12 | 33 | 19 | 51 | 6 | 16 |
| Conversation (in a group) | 23 | 62 | 11 | 30 | 3 | 8 |
| Informal discussion with your friends | 11 | 30 | 17 | 46 | 9 | 24 |
| Listening to the BBC, The Voice of America, etc. | 19 | 51 | 15 | 41 | 3 | 8 |
| Listening to songs in English | 1 | 3 | 18 | 51 | 16 | 46 |
| Watching films in their original language | 3 | 9 | 25 | 71 | 7 | 20 |
| Making a presentation to a group of friends | 23 | 62 | 14 | 38 | 0 | 0 |
| Talking to native speakers of the target language or tourists speaking English | 21 | 57 | 13 | 35 | 3 | 8 |

Which of these items are easy or difficult?

| Easy | Raw score | Percentage Score (%) |
|---|-----------|----------------------|
| Conversation (with another person) | 6 | 16 |
| Conversation (in a group) | 5 | 13 |
| Informal discussion with your friends | 9 | 24 |
| Listening to the BBC, The Voice of America | 4 | 11 |
| Listening to songs in English | 16 | 42 |
| Watching films in their original sound | 9 | 24 |
| Making a presentation to a group of friends | 2 | 5 |
| Talking to native speakers of the target language and/or tourists speaking in English | 3 | 8 |

| Difficult | Raw score | Percentage Score (%) |
|------------------------------------|-----------|----------------------|
| Conversation (with another person) | 5 | 13 |

| | | |
|--|----|----|
| Conversation (in a group) | 10 | 26 |
| Informal discussion with your friends | 2 | 5 |
| Listening to the BBC, The Voice of America | 9 | 24 |
| Listening to songs in English | 5 | 13 |
| Watching films in their original language | 5 | 13 |
| Making a presentation to a group of friends | 4 | 11 |
| Talking to native speakers of the target language and tourists speaking in English | 21 | 55 |

Table III. The results of Question 3 (*Do you think it will be important to be able to comprehend English sentences and to communicate in English well orally? And if so, for what sort of purposes?*)

| | Raw scores | Percentage score (%) |
|--|------------|----------------------|
| To be a good English teacher | 15 | 40 |
| To communicate with people speaking this language | 14 | 38 |
| It is an international language | 5 | 13 |
| To have the opportunity of improving speaking skills | 5 | 13 |
| To have further education | 4 | 11 |
| To express oneself | 2 | 5 |
| To use in every part of live | 1 | 3 |

Table IV. The results of Question 4. (*Do you think oral communication is important in your education?*)

| | Raw scores | Percentage score (%) |
|---|------------|----------------------|
| Positive views (i.e., Yes) | | |
| To practice English and improve language skills | 16 | 42 |
| Writing is not enough, we should speak English properly | 7 | 18 |
| To communicate with people | 6 | 16 |
| To overcome some problems such as excitement, being shy, etc. it is necessary | 3 | 8 |
| To understand the subjects | 3 | 8 |
| Knowing only grammar rules is not enough | 3 | 8 |
| To be ready in our future career we must speak English | 2 | 5 |
| Negative views (i.e. No) | | |
| In our education writing is important but for the speaking lesson speaking is necessary | 6 | 16 |
| Writing is easier than speaking because you have more time | 1 | 3 |

Table V. The results of Question 5. (*What do you do or what do you concentrate on when you are given a listening and/or speaking task?*)

| Before you carry out the task | Raw scores | Percentage score (%) |
|--|------------|----------------------|
| Searching for some words and expressions that can be used in the task | 17 | 44 |
| Concentrating on the listening activity | 12 | 32 |
| Planning the sentences I can use | 12 | 32 |
| Getting excited by the fear of making mistakes or not speaking fluently | 8 | 21 |
| Trying to be ready for the listening and speaking activity psychologically as I am excited | 7 | 18 |
| Having the feeling of failure before the listening task | 1 | 3 |

Table VI. The results of Question 5. (*What do you do or what do you concentrate on when you are given a listening and/or speaking task?*)

| While you are carrying out the task | Raw scores | Percentage score (%) |
|---|------------|----------------------|
| Paying attention to grammar rules while speaking | 13 | 34 |
| Being excited while speaking and hence forgetting or mixing up the things I would say | 11 | 29 |
| Taking notes while listening | 9 | 24 |
| Using the fixed expressions taught in speaking classes | 9 | 24 |
| While listening I miss some parts and lose my concentration | 5 | 13 |
| Carrying out the task as I planned before the task | 4 | 11 |
| Selecting words carefully | 3 | 8 |
| Repeating the things I hear in the listening material on my own | 2 | 5 |
| Translating sentences I planned from Turkish into English | 1 | 3 |

Table VII. The results of Question 5. (*What do you do or what do you concentrate on when you are given a listening and/or speaking task?*)

| When you have finished the task | Raw scores | Percentage score (%) |
|---|------------|----------------------|
| Concentrating on mistakes, and in the case of having many mistakes, feeling upset | 23 | 60 |
| Feeling relaxed after the speaking task | 13 | 34 |
| Writing the sentences and going through the expressions introduced in the class | 11 | 29 |
| Controlling the grammatical structures after the task | 4 | 11 |
| Being disappointed after finishing the listening task because of having few things in my mind | 3 | 8 |
| Putting the notes together after listening task | 2 | 5 |
| Feeling sad because of not knowing enough words to express my thoughts | 1 | 3 |

Table VIII. The results of Question 6. (i.e. *What difficulties do you have in listening and/or speaking tasks?*)

| Speaking | Raw scores | Percentage score (%) |
|--|------------|----------------------|
| Not deciding which expression is convenient while talking about the topic (i.e., lack of vocabulary) | 22 | 58 |
| Not producing the sentences planned beforehand | 9 | 24 |
| Trembling because of fear of making mistakes | 8 | 21 |
| Not using grammatical rules properly | 5 | 13 |
| Making mistakes because of not having planned the sentences | 4 | 11 |
| Listening | | |
| Not catching everything because of fast conversations in the tapes | 21 | 56 |
| Not understanding the speech, especially if the speaker is from a different language background such as Chinese, Spanish, etc. | 9 | 24 |
| Not hearing what the speaker says | 4 | 11 |
| Not being able to concentrate on the subject | 3 | 8 |
| Lack of practice because of not having done such exercises before | 3 | 8 |
| Forgetting the subject of the listening material if some notes are not taken | 2 | 5 |