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Foreign Language Speaking Anxiety in Turkish EFL Context: Towards an In-Depth Clarification

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Abstract

Speaking anxiety in second language acquisition is currently a topic of extensive research. This study aims to assess the extent of speaking anxiety among EFL (English as a foreign language) learners attending preparatory schools and examine how demographic factors such as age, high school, and gender influence Foreign Language Speaking Anxiety (FLSA), as well as identify its sources. The participants were 172 preparatory school students (67 female and 105 male) enrolled in the School of Foreign Languages and from two different English proficiency levels, B1 (N = 107) and B2 (N = 65), according to the CEFR. A mixed type research methodology was employed. Data was analysed using T-Tests, ANOVA, and Pearson Correlation tests through Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) 26. The findings of this study indicated that EFL students generally experience moderate levels of anxiety in their speaking courses. Gender emerged as a significant factor, with female students displaying higher levels of anxiety compared to their male counterparts when it comes to speaking in a foreign language. The study identified three primary sources of foreign language speaking anxiety: personal, teacher-related, and environmental. Furthermore, participants exhibited psychological and physical reactions to FLSA, suggesting that anxiety in speaking a foreign language goes beyond mere emotional distress. These insights provide valuable recommendations for educators and authorities to address speaking anxiety among EFL learners.

Keywords: foreign language speaking anxiety, individual difference, EFL, learning English as a foreign language.

1. Introduction

The second language learning process might be an outrageous experience for some language learners due to some factors such as cultural differences, transliteration, social stereotyping, misunderstandings, and some psychological factors such as lack of confidence, learned

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helplessness, and anxiety. Anxiety has many adverse effects on students' language learning process. Foreign Language Speaking Anxiety (FLSA) experienced by many learners during their foreign language learning process is a multi-directional psychological fact. Previous research has shown that the number of foreign language learners suffering from speech anxiety is substantial (Akkakason, 2016; Aksu, 2018; Daud et al., 2019; Damayanti, Listyani, 2020; Bashori et al., 2020, Ülker, 2021). Foreign language anxiety creates a mental block in learners' minds against language learning. Moreover, it paves the way for shyness which inhibits healthy communication; fear of failure, which leads to a setback; and fear of negative evaluation, which leads to an unwillingness to learn. Although studies on this issue have focused on four primary areas -the causes, relationship between variables, level of speaking anxiety, and decreasing speaking anxiety- increasing problem shows that the issue needs to be examined in detail. Mahatma Gandhi states; "A correct diagnosis is three-fourths the remedy" (cited by Kothari, Tilvawala, 2017). Therefore, by focusing on the sources of FLSA to make an accurate diagnosis, this study was conducted to help not only the people in the field –teachers, students, administrators, and parents – but also people who are decision-makers and other stakeholders.

Theoretical Framework

Anxiety

Anxiety is defined in the Encyclopedia Britannica as "a feeling of dread, fear, or anxiety, often without a clear justification". According to Dörnyei and Ryan (2015), anxiety is characterized by obsessive individuality and dynamism. According to the Big Five personality model Norman and Goldberg created between 1963 and 1981, anxiety is a crucial part of the Neuroticism/Emotional Stability factor. It cannot be claimed that anxiety is not a feeling, as Gray (1982) states. However, one can question if anxiety is the only emotion in our thinking system, considering the abundance of studies on it and the work of psychologists.

Anxiety has been the subject of research with different aspects for a long time. Given this research, a consensus has been reached that three main types of anxiety are trait, state, and situation-specific. If a person's anxiety level does not change according to the situation, in other words, if they are worried in every situation, the anxiety experienced by this person can be called trait anxiety (Pappamihiel, 2002). For no particular reason, such people experience anxiety in every situation.

In contrast to trait anxiety, state anxiety happens when a person feels threatened or in danger in a given circumstance. It is described by Spielberger (1983) and Pappamihiel (2002) as the propensity to feel uneasy in certain circumstances at a particular time. Furthermore, according to Keramida and Tsiplakides (2009), although trait anxiety is universal since it is unaffected by any environment, state anxiety is a social type particular to specific circumstances. Finally, Wiedemann (2015) asserts that every individual may experience state anxiety to varied degrees, with each person's experience differing in intensity, frequency, and length. Situation-specific anxiety is intensely linked to certain conditions (Young, 1991; Aida, 1994). The ramifications of a particular situation could pave the way to this anxiety, which happens in a particular situation (MacIntyre, Gardner, 1991).

Anxiety, viewed as a mental condition and treated as an unwanted emotion, is occasionally considered advantageous. Alpert and Haber (1960) distinguished between debilitating anxiety, which hinders individuals from learning new knowledge, and facilitating anxiety, which enables people to cope with a situation or to control and guide something. Based on its impacts on performance and learning, anxiety was appraised by Scovel (1978) as "facilitating and debilitating" in two separate components. Additionally, inhibitory anxiety presents as "avoidance behavior" in new learning, in contrast to facilitating anxiety, which causes effort and "approach behavior." Therefore, the level of anxiety facilitates or debilitates a person's learning. When a person with a moderate level of anxiety is compared with a person who is very anxious, it might be observed that the former can easily accomplish the same task, while the other may have great difficulty in doing it.

Anxiety in Foreign Language Learning

In the new age called the 'communication age', speaking skills and the ability to express oneself in a foreign language have become more critical than ever. Meanwhile, while slowly but surely advancing, the English language's tendency to expand its dominance over other languages for nearly two centuries continues to permeate all spheres of society. Thus, the common language,

which emerged due to globalization, is needed by people living in different countries for their various needs. Graddol (2006) states that this creates a cycle in itself; that is, the more globalization increases, the more the use of English will increase, and the process goes on in this order. The complex language system and sociocultural traditions may hinder learners from interacting adequately and effectively, improving their foreign language learning. As a result, learning a foreign language and using it effectively for communication purposes has become a severe cause of anxiety for students. The fact that anxiety is analysed and studied in a wide variety of ways in the process of foreign language teaching is one of the crucial indicators of this situation (Horwitz et al., 1986; Gardner, MacIntyre, 1993; Wilson, 2006; Woodrow, 2006; Aydın, 2016; Aydın, 2008). Especially Horwitz et al. (1986) pioneered the researchers who came after them with their studies focusing on anxiety in target language education.

Woodrow (2006) asserts that language learners respond to their anxiety in two ways: intellectually, by worrying, and physically, through emotional reflection. Both of these responses considerably impede communication. Anxiety can affect the performance of even students who have a significant amount of knowledge about language, making it significantly more difficult for them to use this knowledge. For this reason, students with high levels of anxiety may find it challenging to achieve the success they want in terms of foreign language learning. Related studies have put forward the area that there is a negative relationship between foreign language learning and high level of anxiety (Aida, 1994; Wilson, 2006; Woodrow, 2006; MacIntyre, Gregersen, 2012; Öztürk, Gürbüz, 2014).

Foreign Language Speaking Anxiety

Speaking allows individuals to exchange information, send messages, express themselves verbally with one another, and express their emotions (Nunan, 2003). Thus, the primary purpose of learning a language is to transform the learned information into production in the target language. One of the leading indicators showing that people know the target language is that they can speak it; that is, they can convey what they mean to the other party. Hence, students who are aware that speaking is one of the main factors in knowing the target language feel anxious while speaking.

Although the reasons vary from person to person, speaking is considered by most people to be the most challenging part of learning a second language. As Pinter (2006) emphasizes, this is because speaking and thinking must be done concurrently for us to talk well. As we talk, we must keep an eye on what we are saying, check for errors, and make plans for our following phrases. As a result of many studies, it has been observed that speech anxiety is also related to anxiety types. For instance, in his study, Riasati (2011) revealed that there is a relationship between the state anxiety of foreign language learners and their desire to avoid speaking. He maintains that this circumstance can be driven logically; individuals' state anxiety might benefit them. Contrarily, situation-specific anxiety should be assessed differently from other types of worry, according to Horwitz et al. (1986), because recent data suggest that it is distinct from other theoretical worries. Some academics contend that learning a foreign language should be seen as a unique phenomenon and place it within the context of situation-specific anxiety (Price, 1991; Young, 1991).

While students with foreign language anxiety show a reluctant approach to foreign language lessons in proportion to their anxiety, language speaking anxiety may prevent learners from avoiding tasks that require language production skills and attending language lessons that require them to use their communication skills. As a result, this situation leads to the emergence of students who do not care about being ready for the lesson, frequently leave the course early, struggle to recall and apply the knowledge in their memory, and put little effort into resolving these and related issues. (Horwitz et al., 1986; MacIntyre, Gardner, 1991; Phillips, 1992; Gregersen, Horwitz, 2002; Bekleyen, 2009; Tekin, Aydın, 2022). Some of the physical symptoms of speech anxiety that can be observed in the person can be listed as follows; fear, rapid heartbeat, sadness, sweating, and anger (Demir, Melanhoğlu, 2014).

The Previous Research on Speaking Anxiety

Since speaking anxiety affects academic success, it has been studied a lot. In their studies, researchers have mainly focused on the level of speaking anxiety, the sources of speaking anxiety, the relation of speaking anxiety with other variables, and the ways of decreasing speaking anxiety. Some research revealed that speaking anxiety is caused by personal beliefs such as a lack of self-confidence (Sadeghi et al., 2013; Melouah, 2013; Ataş, 2015; Gürsoy, Korkmaz, 2018; ElSharkawy, 2019; Özdemir, Papi, 2021), fear of making mistakes, attitudes towards L1 or L2, native speakers or teachers (Çokay, 2014; Ataş, 2015). Since it was mentioned as a factor in many studies, it could be said

that 'aware of being evaluated' or 'negative evaluation' is one of the crucial sources of speaking anxiety (Ahmed, 2016; Ataş, 2015; Hammad, Ghali, 2015; Sadighi, Dastpak, 2017; Usman, Yumru, 2019).

Interaction and communication are vital for Students in language classrooms. Nevertheless, this situation might turn into an anxiety-creating factor. While Çokay (2014) stated that "fear of interaction" hinders learners from communicating by creating speaking anxiety, "language proficiency problems" (Ak, 2021), 'fear of being laughed at' (Ataş, 2015; Doyman, Yumru, 2020), 'mispronunciation of words' (Çokay, 2014) and 'peer pressure' or 'the harsh attitudes of classmates' (Melouah, 2013; Mukminin et al., 2015; Han et al., 2016; Mouhoubi-Messadh, 2017; Rahman, 2017; Doyman, Yumru, 2020) were also mentioned among anxiety creating factors. Sometimes, people compare themselves with others in different stages of life for different reasons. In the classroom setting, in which human interaction is comparatively high, this attitude is inevitable. While some researchers (Kayaoğlu; Sağlamel, 2013; Kasbi; Shirvan, 2017; ElSharkawy, 2019) described this source of anxiety in their studies as 'competition', Doyman & Yumru (2020) defined it as 'getting left behind. According to Doyman and Yumru (2020), the 'desire of students to produce perfect speech' and 'develop a perfectionist approach to the target language' makes learners anxious.

The characteristic of learners might affect their speaking anxiety. For example, in some research, lack of self-confidence and 'the introverted character of students were found to be strongly and significantly interrelated with overall speaking anxiety (Sadeghi et al., 2013; Melouah, 2013; Ataş, 2015; Gürsoy, Korkmaz, 2018; ElSharkawy, 2019; Özdemir, Papi 2021).

The studies showed that inadequacy in a foreign language is essential in speaking anxiety. In the learning process, 'the fear of making mistakes was found as a robust anxiety-creative factor (Ataş, 2015; Han et al., 2016; Ahmed, 2016; Sadighi, Dastpak, 2017; Gürsoy, Korkmaz, 2018; ElSharkawy, 2019). Mistakes that show the problematic areas learners face are found as important indicators. Some studies point to 'vocabulary deficiency' as the cause of speech anxiety (Brown, 2004; Sadeghi et al., 2013; Mukminin et al., 2015; Rahman, 2017; Sadighi, Dastpak, 2017; Kasbi, Shirvan, 2017). Even if the learners have enough knowledge about the grammatical rules, if they do not have enough vocabulary, speaking might be an anxious experiment for them. Similarly, it is stated that 'the number of grammar rules, 'grammar knowledge, and 'the difficulty of applying the rules while speaking' have caused anxiety in learners (Sadeghi et al., 2013; Mukminin et al., 2015; Rahman, 2017; Kasbi, Shirvan, 2017).

Speaking anxiety has been linked to oral tests and testing processes as well. (Sadeghi et al., 2013; Kayaoğlu, Sağlamel, 2013; Al-Nouh et al., 2015; Alsowat, 2016; Usman, Yumru, 2019; ElSharkawy, 2019). The main factors causing anxiety for teachers are activity types, topics, language teachers' attitudes, teacher's feedback type, being invited to participate in the lesson, unable to follow what the teacher is saying, and the teacher's negative reactions. There is also a consensus among some researchers that these are critical anxiety-provoking factors related to foreign language speaking anxiety (Subaşı, 2010; Mak, 2011; Melouah, 2013; Sadeghi et al., 2013; Ataş, 2015; Hammad, Ghali, 2015; Alsowat, 2016; Mouhoubi-Messadh, 2017; Doyman, Yumru, 2020).

With its negative implications, anxiety has emerged as a significant area of study for researchers in the second language (L2) field. Remarkably, there has been a discernible rise in research concentrating on speaking anxiety. However, qualitative research in this area still needs to be expanded, warranting a more outstanding contribution to enhance our understanding of the subject. Moreover, more than quantitative studies are needed to offer a comprehensive perspective for deeper comprehension. Therefore, aligning with the studies mentioned above, this study attempts to determine the degree of speaking anxiety among EFL learners and investigate the impact of demographic factors such as age, high school background, and gender on foreign language speaking anxiety. In addition, the study explores the sources of speaking anxiety in the Turkish EFL context. In line with the stated objectives and a comprehensive review of the literature, the following research questions have been formulated:

1. How anxious are Turkish EFL learners while they are speaking English?
2. To what extent do specific demographic characteristics influence foreign language speaking anxiety?
3. What are the possible sources of speaking anxiety in a Turkish EFL setting?

2. Methodology

In this study, both qualitative and quantitative data were gathered using a mixed research methodology. By capturing both trends and more details while utilizing the advantages of each technique, the use of mixed methods results in a thorough grasp of the study topic (Miles, Huberman, 1994; Creswell et al., 2003).

Participants and Setting

The questionnaire was administered to 172 preparatory school students (67 female and 105 male) enrolled in the School of Foreign Languages. The School of Foreign Languages provides English language courses to first-year EFL learners, equipping them with the necessary skills for their academic pursuits. The students were at two different English proficiency levels, B1 (N = 107) and B2 (N = 65), according to the CEFR. They came from 8 high schools and studied in 11 different departments. Their ages ranged from 18 to 43 with the mean of 20. The total population of the school is 280, with the sample size representing 61% of it. A convenience sampling method was used in the selection of the participants. In other words, among the students of the preparatory school, only those who were at the school on the day of the data collection and volunteers were included in the study. The students were first given an informed consent form about the study and assured that the data would be kept confidential and used only for a scientific study.

After completing the first phase of the study (quantitative data collection and analysis), the students' anxiety levels were considered. The study's second phase involved 11 volunteer students who self-reported high anxiety levels. Their ages ranged from 19 to 23, with five of them being female and at the upper-intermediate level, while six participants were male and at the intermediate level. They graduated from four different high schools and were studying in six different departments. The distribution of participants across departments was relatively equal.

Data Collection and Analysis

Quantitative data were collected through a questionnaire consisting of two parts: a demographic information form with five questions and the Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (FLCAS) with 18 questions focusing specifically on speaking anxiety. The original scale with 33 items, developed by Horwitz et al. (1986), was adapted by Saltan (2003) to include only the 18 items related to speaking anxiety. The questionnaire utilized a Likert Scale ranging from "Strongly Agree" to "Strongly Disagree". FLCAS is a widely used instrument to assess foreign language anxiety and its level among learners. The adapted version of the scale comprised four dimensions: communication apprehension, fear of negative evaluation, anxiety about English classes, and test anxiety (Altun, 2018).

Table 1. Reliability Statistic of Adapted Version of FLCAS

Anxiety	Number of Items	Cronbach's Alpha	Cronbach's Alpha Based on Standardized Items
Total Anxiety	18	0.93	0.94
Communication apprehension	6	0.82	0.82
Fear of negative evaluation	7	0.81	0.81
Anxiety of English classes	2	0.60	0.60
Test anxiety	3	0.63	0.63

The adapted version of the scale demonstrated strong internal consistency with a Cronbach's alpha coefficient of 0.89. In this study, Cronbach's alpha coefficient for the total anxiety score, as shown in Table 1, was found to be 0.93, indicating high reliability. While the reliability of some dimensions decreased due to a smaller number of items, two dimensions with coefficients slightly below 0.70 are still acceptable, according to Griethuijsen et al. (2015) and Taber (2018) as they exceed 0.60. To analyse the quantitative data firstly, Kolmogorov–Smirnov analysis was employed to test the normality of the data. After ensuring that data follows the normal distribution, descriptive and inferential analysis such as Independent Samples T-Test, ANOVA, and Pearson Correlation were conducted through the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) 26.

For the collection of qualitative data, 11 volunteer participants who reported themselves as highly anxious in the EFL class were selected, and semi-structured focus group interviews were conducted with them. The interviews were conducted in two sessions, with six students at the B1 level and five students at the B2 level. To ensure effectiveness, participants were divided into small groups based on their proficiency level, with each group participating in one session lasting approximately one and a half hour. Before the interviews, participants were informed about the process, including the interview recording using a mobile phone for later analysis. During the interviews, participants were asked four questions. To maintain confidentiality, pseudonyms were used instead of real names, and participants' responses were recorded and transcribed into a Word file. The qualitative data were then analysed using content analysis, which involved four steps: identification, classification, description, and conclusion.

3. Results

This chapter presents the results derived from the analysis of the data sets, organized into three sections corresponding to the three research questions.

Foreign language speaking anxiety of EFL learners

Descriptive analyses were performed to assess EFL learners' foreign language speaking anxiety levels. The participants' anxiety levels were categorized into three groups: slightly anxious (average score between 1.00 and 2.49), moderately anxious (score between 2.50 and 3.49), and highly anxious (score between 3.50 and 5.00). The mean scores and sub-dimensions of anxiety, along with general anxiety levels, are presented in descending order in [Table 2](#). The participants' mean scores for all sub-dimensions of anxiety and general anxiety level ranged between 2.50 and 3.49, indicating a moderate level of anxiety in EFL settings. The descriptive analysis of general anxiety scores revealed that 28 % of participants were slightly anxious, 47 % were moderately anxious, and 25 % were highly anxious.

Table 2. Foreign Language Speaking Anxiety Levels of Participants

Dimensions	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Highly Anxious-f	Moderately Anxious- f	Slightly Anxious- f
Communication Apprehension	172	3.07	0.87	40	36	24
The Anxiety of English Classes	172	3.05	0.94	36	34	30
Fear of Negative Evaluation	172	2.82	0.83	21	46	33
Test Anxiety	172	2.69	1.05	31	34	35
Overall Anxiety	172	2.93	0.80	25	47	28

When examining the frequencies of anxiety, it might be said that individuals have varied degrees of foreign language-speaking anxiety. [Table 2](#) shows that "Communication Apprehension" has the highest anxiety level, followed by "Anxiety of English Classes," "Fear of Negative Evaluation," and "Test Anxiety."

Effects of some demographic factors on Foreign Language Speaking Anxiety:

In the following section, the results of T-Test, ANOVA, and Pearson Correlation are presented to reveal the effects of such independent variables as age, high school, department, and gender on foreign language speaking anxiety of EFL learners.

As can be seen in [Table 3](#), gender is a significant factor on foreign language speaking anxiety. It seems that gender significantly influences all sub-dimensions and the general FLSA of the participants ($p < 0.05$). As shown in [Table 3](#), female participants exhibit higher levels of foreign language speaking anxiety across all four dimensions of FLAS compared to male participants.

Table 3. T-Test of and Foreign Language Speaking Anxiety in terms of Gender

Anxiety	Gender	N	M	SD	t	df	P
Communication Apprehension	Female	67	3.43	0.81	4.59	170	0.00
	Male	105	2.84	0.82			
Fear of Negative Evaluation	Female	67	3.07	0.84	3.41	170	0.00
	Male	105	2.65	0.77			
The Anxiety of English Classes	Female	67	3.02	1.05	3.44	170	0.00
	Male	105	2.47	0.98			
Test Anxiety	Female	67	3.27	0.88	2.48	170	0.01
	Male	105	2.91	0.94			

The analysis of the T-Test results indicated that there is no statistically significant difference between proficiency level and foreign language speaking anxiety of EFL learners ($p > 0.05$). The participants' anxiety levels varied, with those at the upper-intermediate level having the highest level (mean = 3.17) during communication and those at the intermediate level having the highest level of test anxiety (mean = 3.07).

Table 4. T-Test Results of Foreign Language Speaking Anxiety in terms of Proficiency Level

Anxiety	Proficiency Level	N	M	SD	t	df	P
Communication Apprehension	B2	65	3.17	0.92	1.23	170	0.22
	B1	107	3.00	0.83			
Fear of Negative Evaluation	B2	65	2.89	0.88	1.00	170	0.31
	B1	107	2.76	0.79			
The anxiety of English Classes	B2	65	2.84	1.09	1.54	170	0.12
	B1	107	2.59	1.00			
Test Anxiety	B2	65	3.02	1.01	-0.36	170	0.71
	B1	107	3.07	0.89			

Pearson Correlation Analysis was conducted to see the effects of age on EFL learners' speaking anxiety. As can be seen in [Table 5](#), there is no statistically significant difference between Foreign Language Speaking Anxiety (FLSA) and the participants' ages ($p > 0.05$).

Table 5. Pearson Correlation between Age and Foreign Language Speaking Anxiety

Anxiety Types	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	r	P
Communication Apprehension	172	2.15	0.78	0.01	0.62
Fear of Negative Evaluation	172	1.87	0.72	0.00	0.46
The anxiety of English Classes	172	1.95	0.81	-0.01	0.97
Test Anxiety	172	2.05	0.81	0.00	0.85
General Anxiety	172	2.92	0.79	0.08	0.92

The participants in the study originated from 8 different high schools, with the majority (64 %) having graduated from Anatolian High School, while only one participant graduated from Social Sciences High School. [Table 6](#) reveals that the one-way ANOVA test did not reveal a significant difference in Foreign Language Speaking Anxiety (FLSA) among participants from different high schools in all dimensions ($p > 0.05$).

Table 6. One-Way ANOVA Test in terms of High School

		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	P
Communication Apprehension	Between Groups	6.41	6	1.07	1.43	0.20
	Within Groups	122.91	165	0.74		
	Total	129.33	171			
Fear of Negative Evaluation	Between Groups	4.85	6	0.80	1.18	0.31
	Within Groups	112.38	165	0.68		
	Total	117.23	171			
The anxiety of English Classes	Between Groups	8.72	6	1.45	1.34	0.24
	Within Groups	178.38	165	1.08		
	Total	187.10	171			
Test Anxiety	Between Groups	6.64	6	1.10	1.27	0.27
	Within Groups	143.51	165	0.87		
	Total	150.16	171			

The participants in the study pursue their studies in 11 different departments after completing preparatory school. Among these departments, electrical and electronic engineering had the highest number of participants, with 62 students. On the other hand, software engineering, law, and mechanical engineering had only one student each. Table 7 shows that there is no significant difference in terms of Foreign Language Speaking Anxiety (FLSA) among the departments ($p > 0.05$).

Table 7. One-Way ANOVA Test, in terms of Department

		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	P
Communication Apprehension	Between Groups	8.11	10	0.81	1.07	0.38
	Within Groups	121.22	161	0.75		
	Total	129.33	171			
Fear of Negative Evaluation	Between Groups	6.85	10	0.68	1.00	0.45
	Within Groups	110.38	161	0.68		
	Total	117.23	171			
The anxiety of English Classes	Between Groups	10.61	10	1.06	0.96	0.47
	Within Groups	176.49	161	1.10		
	Total	187.10	171			
Test Anxiety	Between Groups	15.09	10	1.51	1.80	0.06
	Within Groups	135.06	161	0.84		
	Total	150.16	171			

The possible sources of foreign language speaking anxiety

A qualitative research technique was also added for a better understanding of the phenomenon of Foreign Language Speaking Anxiety (FLSA) and to identify its underlying causes. Consequently, a series of focus-group interviews with 11 participants who reported themselves as highly anxious in the case of speaking English in class were carried out to address the third research question related to the potential causes of speaking anxiety among English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learners. To organize the qualitative data obtained from these interviews,

the results were presented below under the subheadings based on the interview questions. Codes and themes were discovered during the data analysis, and pertinent literature was extensively utilized to provide context and understanding.

Identifying the Factors Contributing to Anxiety in Speaking English

The data reported here have significant psychological effects when considering the individual differences among foreign language learners. Analysing participants' replies and classifying them into distinctive codes, which were then categorized into three overarching themes – personal, teacher-related, and environmental factors – reveals a multifaceted knowledge of the psychological underpinnings of language learning.

As can be seen in the table, it is seen that the most frequently mentioned reasons for anxiety by the students in the group meetings are largely self-inflicted reasons. Among these reasons, fear of making mistakes, comparing oneself with others and negative perceptions of oneself were mentioned the most. In addition, some perceptions of weakness and inadequacy in language skills were also among the reasons reported by the students, albeit to a lesser extent (Table 8).

Table 8. The sources of Foreign Language Speaking Anxiety

Personal sources	Teacher-related sources	Environmental sources
fear of making a mistake	teacher's feedback type	peer pressure
comparing with others	negative reactions by the teacher	fear of negative evaluation
negative self-assessment	unexpected questions from the teacher	
the introverted character	language teachers' manners	
perfectionism	not understanding what the teacher says	
lack of practice		
Fear of mispronunciation		
lack of grammar knowledge		
fear of public speaking		
lack of vocabulary		

Among the teacher-based reasons, the most frequently reported reasons by students were teacher's feedback type, teacher's negative reactions towards students in the classroom, and teacher's unexpected questions. Reasons related to language skills, such as not being able to understand what the teacher said, were also mentioned in students' sentences (Table 8).

In the third group of the reasons, only the fear that peers will either evaluate them negatively or react in some way, such as laughing or making fun of them, stemming from the environmental or classroom atmosphere and the behaviour of classroom stakeholders, was reported (Table 8).

Reactions to FLSA: Physical vs. Psychological Manifestations

The responses provided by the participants regarding physical reactions can be observed in the table below, presented in two columns. To better understand the various ways language anxiety emerges, the participants' responses were divided into two main themes, physical and psychological. Physical reactions consist of 16 codes and psychological reactions consist of 7 codes. The fact that physical rather than psychological disruptions are the primary ways in which anxiety presents itself draws attention to the tangible, visibly discernible features of anxiety. This distinction is important because it emphasizes how anxiety affects the body and behaviour as well as cognition and emotion.

Table 9. The reactions of the participants against FLSA

Physical Reactions	Psychological Reactions
Trembling in hands	The feeling of choking up and inability to speak
Rubbing the hands	Inability to subside the excitement for a long time
Clicking the fingers	Inability to hear oneself talking
Faltering of the voice	Inability to run the process of speaking
Continuous movement, inability to stay still	Forgetting the meaning of the word you know
The movement to the sides	Freezing and not knowing what to say
Blushing	Forgetting what you are talking about
Increasing the pulse rate	
Unwanted excessive movement of the hands	
Swallowing the words	
Biting the lips	
Stammering	
Laughing unintentionally	
Sweating in hands	

Students’ suggestions for an anxiety-free class environment

The participants were asked to define their ideal and anxiety-free learning environment in order to determine the factors that would help to reduce their anxiety. The comments received, and the inferences drawn from them are displayed in the table below. As seen in Table 10, nineteen codes and 3 themes were gathered from the statements made by the students for an anxiety-free classroom environment. The first of these themes based on the codes is the Instructor Based theme and four codes were collected under this theme. The second theme is Environment Based and five codes were collected under this theme. Finally, ten codes were collected under the Instruction Based theme. As can be seen, students most frequently reported instruction-based reasons for creating an anxiety-free classroom environment, followed by classroom environment-based reasons and finally instructor-based reasons (Table 10).

Table 10. The suggestions to decrease FLSA

Instructor Based	Environment Based	Instruction Based
Showing empathy	Comfortable atmosphere	Interesting subject
Encouraging	Less crowded classroom	Group work
Patient	Friendly atmosphere	Role play, drama, game
Friendly	Subjecting to English too much	No assessment
	Attending classes with foreign students	Game, film, series
		Lessons focused on activity.
		Authentic topics
		Interrelated topics with other courses
		Topics that are already known
		Creative activities

4. Discussion

The study indicated that numerous factors affect the variation in anxiety levels within the participant group. Making inclusive and prosperous environments for language learning

requires understanding this variability. The study made it clear that almost half EFL learners have moderate levels of anxiety while one fourth of them high level of foreign language speaking anxiety. It seems that speaking anxiety is not a problem for only slightly more than one fourth of the learners. So, it seems that certainly anxiety should be handled appropriately to help the learners in their foreign language learning process. In fact, these findings align with the previous studies conducted with both Turkish (Takan, 2014; Zambak, 2016; Gürsoy, Korkmaz, 2018) and foreign EFL learners (Woodrow, 2006; Ahmed, 2016; Daud, 2019) and accordingly anxiety seems to be a problem for EFL learners around the world.

It is significant to emphasize that while the majority of students display moderate levels of anxiety, the existence of very anxious pupils should not be disregarded. The anxiety spectrum in this study among EFL learners proves that anxiety is not a constant concept but varies in intensity, as discussed in the literature (MacIntyre, Gregersen, 2012; Öztürk, Gürbüz, 2014). It is essential to comprehend this range because it enables educators to personalize the teaching procedures used in the classroom setting to meet the unique requirements of students at various positions along the anxiety continuum. Thus, the teachers will be aware that moderately anxious learners may need techniques to keep their anxiety from worsening, and highly anxious individuals may benefit from specialized interventions to boost confidence and reduce stress. "Communication Apprehension" sub-dimension is seen as the highest level of anxiety. It is thought that students' perception of being the centre of attention in the classroom when they communicate in English causes this. Communication apprehension is exactly related to kind of timidity and reluctance in case of communication (Horwitz et al., 1986). Hence, it should be highlighted at this point that there are various factors that lead to anxiety during communication.

Data collected through interviews also support this finding and based on the responses and utterances of the learners it was evident that the participants lack confidence while speaking in class. Although the sources of anxiety that came to the fore in the students' statements were categorised under three categories as personal, teacher-related and environmental in accordance with the literature (Dixon, 2011; Umisara, et al., 2021), the sources were largely grouped under the "personal sources" category. The students attributed the causes of anxiety mostly to their own individual features and individual inadequacies. Additionally, learners' feeling of pressure to meet immediate conversational expectations, and factors such as the topic, formality, the interlocutor, and their English proficiency also increase anxiety levels. It was often reported that, these cases cause learners panic without preparation and have difficulties understanding what the teacher says to make them nervous.

Although test anxiety ranks the lowest compared to other types of anxiety, it shows that almost one third of the total students experience varying levels of test anxiety. This is a very large proportion indeed and as seen in the literature (Aydn et al., 2020; Petridou, Williams, 2007) it might affect students' achievement in learning by decreasing learners' motivation and increasing the mistakes. This is because tests are seen as crucial for assessment but also have negative psychological effects on students. For example, participants reported trembling and rapid heartbeat before and during exams and when they were asked to speak in language classes, feeling embarrassed to speak voluntarily, upset when they did not understand the teacher's corrections, and perceived other students as superior than themselves. Furthermore, tests create a false perception of language learning as similar to other academic subjects. This perspective overlooks its communicative nature and leads learners to approach the second language like any other school subject.

As mentioned above, the finding that the majority of FLSA may be ascribed to individual factors is noteworthy. It implies that language anxiety among learners is significantly influenced by their personal beliefs and emotional responses, such as fear of making a mistake, comparing with others, and negative self-assessment. This is consistent with the understanding that language learners' internal thoughts and emotions significantly impact their experiences. Among the identified sources, 'fear of negative evaluation' and 'negative self-assessment' emerge as the most frequently mentioned items. These findings align with previous studies conducted by Iftimie (2006), Mak (2011), Tanrıöver (2012), Çokay (2014), and, Ataş (2015). It is essential to comprehend these individual components to create anxiety-relieving tactics that help.

Peer pressure is the only item directly connected to environmental elements, which is remarkable given the small number of components related to instructional and environmental factors. According to this finding, participants may view the classroom setting as generally favourable, with few elements that could cause anxiety. This finding is encouraging for language

teachers because it suggests that a helpful and inviting environment for language practice might be created in the classroom. The specific aspects revealed to be essential drivers of FLSA, like "fear of negative evaluation" and "negative self-assessment," shed light on widespread underpinning psychological mechanisms causing anxiety. Language anxiety frequently includes self-criticism and the fear of being harshly judged which affects learners' confidence and limits their desire to speak. To promote a more joyful and productive learning environment, addressing these major sources of anxiety is crucial. The consistency of these results with earlier researches by Liu (2007), Stewart and Tassie (2011), Tanröver (2012), Sadeghi (2013), Okay (2014), Derakhsha, Tahery and Mirarab (2015) and Ataş (2015) strengthen the conclusion. Consistency among studies supports the notion that these anxiety-provoking situations are common to language learners. This concordance emphasizes the validity and applicability of the identified anxiety-inducing factors. Peer interaction is beneficial in the context of language learning, as evidenced by the mention of "peer pressure" as a factor that causes anxiety and the observation that students support one another in overcoming speaking challenges. This cooperative approach helps create a more encouraging classroom environment, even when a minority is displaying discomfort. For instance, interviewer Ocean explains that some of her friends express discomfort with mistakes through gestures, facial expressions, body language, and occasional noise.

The reactions of the students when they experienced speaking anxiety were categorised into two groups, physical and psychological, based on their reports of their experiences and inspired by the literature (Dixon, 2011; Umisara, et al., 2021). As suggested by Horwitz et al. (1986), the significant divergence is the recognition that psychological disturbances directly obstruct the cognitive processes involved in speaking, while physical disturbances indirectly impact speaking. It implies that physical signs, such as trembling or a racing heart could serve as intermediaries and interfere with an individual's capability to produce language effectively (Jalongo, Hirsh, 2010). Conversely, psychological symptoms like self-doubt or mental barriers directly impact the cognitive processes required for linguistic communication. The consistency of the results across investigations supports the validity of the discovered reaction patterns. This congruence further strengthens the generalizability of the findings by indicating that linguistic anxiety emotions have some degree of universality and are not restricted to particular circumstances (Horwitz et al., 1986; Jalongo, Hirsh, 2010). This awareness highlights the complexity of language anxiety and the demand for all-encompassing strategies that consider many facets of learners' experiences. When it comes to the reactions of the students in this study, it was seen that students reported more physical reactions and trembling in hands, rubbing the hands, clicking the fingers, and faltering of the voice were the most frequently reported physical reactions. On the other hand, psychological reactions such as the feeling of choking up and inability to speak, and freezing and not knowing what to say are also serious reactions that can affect a student's performance. Hence, it is necessary to emphasise that all of them may lead to a decrease in attention, concentration and motivation of the students.

The students who experienced the negative effects of anxiety suggested solutions based on instructor, environment and instruction, referring to the same themes they used when describing the sources of anxiety, while comprehensively describing an anxiety-free classroom atmosphere. However, there is an interesting discrepancy between the participants' initial interview responses (where personal issues were identified as leading causes of anxiety) and their suggestions for an ideal classroom environment (where personal issues were not mentioned) offers intriguing insights. This suggests that learners might recognize the personal nature of their anxiety but may look to the educational environment for solutions. It highlights the potential impact of the learning context in addressing anxiety, even when the sources of anxiety are acknowledged as personal. The finding that participants expect curriculum, instruction, and classroom activities to change to reduce anxiety suggests a belief that outside forces will bring about essential improvements. This can be connected to a sense of resistance to personal transformation. It illustrates a typical psychological phenomenon in which people are aware of a problem but may rely on other people or outside forces to bring about change.

Furthermore, while the students stated that group work, role play, drama, game-based teaching methods would reduce anxiety and relax them, they also emphasized the need for a non-exam-based assessment system. In addition, they frequently cited empathy, Encouraging, Patient and Friendly attitude of the instructor as the most effective suggestions to reduce anxiety. Instructor attitudes and feedback styles have been emphasized many times in the literature as

anxiety provoking factors (Aydin, 2008). In brief, the results have substantial implications for comprehending the individual characteristics of language learners, especially in connection to their opinions of the ideal learning environment and their expectations of anxiety reduction. The participants' desire for a warm classroom setting with engaging language activities demonstrates that they are aware of the psychological significance of the learning environment. Language anxiety can be decreased, and a positive outlook on language learning can be fostered in a supportive classroom environment. In this sense, the study highlights the extent the educational context affects how students feel. The emphasis on the instructor's role in building rapport and offering support draws attention to the psychological impact of the teacher-student interaction on students' feelings of anxiety. Students believe that the instructor's disposition, method of instruction, and interpersonal abilities play a significant role in fostering a positive learning environment. Support from the instructor can boost students' comfort and confidence, which can ultimately reduce anxiety.

One of the important results of the study was the effects of demographic factors on anxiety, the most noteworthy of which was the gender factor that created significant differences in all dimensions of anxiety. All types of anxiety are experienced more by female students. Gender is a complicated social and psychological concept that can influence several language acquisition topics, such as self-perception, communication preferences, and social norms. So, there seem to be gender-related variations in the experience of speaking in a foreign language, according to the conclusion that gender strongly affects all sub-dimensions and the overall FLSA of the participants. This outcome emphasizes the need to consider gender-related aspects when creating environments and support systems for language learning. It is vital that female participants show higher degrees of speaking anxiety in foreign languages across all four FLSA characteristics. This is consistent with earlier studies in the literature (Huang, 2004; Wilson, 2006; Korkmaz, 2019; Ülker, 2021), showing that gender and language anxiety are related consistently.

In addition, essential insights through the finding that "Communication Apprehension" is the dimension where anxiety levels are highest for both genders were gained. This indicates that anxiety about speaking in a foreign language is prevalent for both male and female learners. To manage anxiety associated with communication, targeted interventions might be based on an understanding of this similarity. The fact that "Anxiety of English Classes" has the lowest anxiety levels across the four dimensions for both groups implies that this particular environment may be considered less anxiety-inducing than other facets of language learning. This deep comprehension of anxiety across various dimensions can influence curriculum creation and instructional design. Thus, gender emerges as a significant factor in language anxiety, consistent with studies such as Neuman (2007), Ayu Rita and Nadhia Dalila (2008), Fakhri 2012 and Bozok (2014). Nevertheless, the study's results contradict following research; Wang (2010), Gaibani and Elmenfi (2014) and Ahmed (2016).

It is critical to consider specific demographic parameters, regional and cultural characteristics when assessing possible explanations for these findings. The study was conducted at a university where most of the students come from neighbouring cities in the Eastern Anatolia Region of Turkey with typical family arrangements. Eastern Anatolia is a region where people are mostly conservative and girls do not have as much freedom in the family and in society as boys. There may be some factors that affect the Foreign Language Speaking Anxiety (FLEA) experienced by female students under these cultural norms and social expectations. For example, the environment may be perceived to limit girls' chances and freedoms, which may be considered a natural right for boys. This discrepancy in perceived independence may prevent girls from developing critical social skills such as effective communication and self-expression. Because of this cultural imbalance, girls are disadvantaged relative to boys because of their gender. These observations show how gender-related social norms can have an impact on the local situation. In order to create more equitable and effective language teaching practices, it is imperative to be aware of the broader sociocultural variables that can significantly influence the language learning experiences of learners, especially girls.

Finally, in the study, the department in which the university students studied and the proficiency levels of the students were not found to be important factors in terms of speaking anxiety. However, based on the differences observed in the students' scores it might be said that apart from exam-related anxiety, a clear tendency should be noted that as proficiency level rises, so does anxiety. According to these results, individuals' anxiety levels are often consistent regardless

of their proficiency. This result is in line with earlier research conducted by Balemir (2009), Oksal (2014), and Eftima (2018) whereas it contradicts what Bailay and Nunan (2005), Oxford, (2016), Özkan (2019) and Özcanlı (2021) determined. However, when it comes to the exam, students with high proficiency may be more relaxed than students with low proficiency. This suggests that students' anxiety may also be related to their proficiency in a foreign language.

5. Conclusion and Implications

The primary objective of this research was to assess the extent and nature of speaking anxiety among English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learners enrolled in preparatory schools and to identify the underlying causes of this anxiety. Based on the findings, several key conclusions can be drawn. Firstly, it can be inferred that EFL students generally experience moderate levels of anxiety when it comes to speaking in English. This indicates that speaking anxiety is a prevailing concern among this group of learners. Secondly, a significant conclusion of the study is that gender plays a crucial role in speaking anxiety, with female students exhibiting higher levels of anxiety compared to their male counterparts. This gender-based difference in anxiety levels sheds light on potential areas for further investigation and support. Thirdly, the study categorized the sources of speaking anxiety into three main factors: personal, teacher-related, and environmental. By recognizing these distinct sources, educators and policymakers can implement targeted strategies to alleviate speaking anxiety among EFL learners. Lastly, the research highlighted that EFL learners respond to speaking anxiety both psychologically and physically. This implies that the impact of anxiety extends beyond the emotional realm and can manifest physically, underscoring the importance of addressing this issue.

Considering the conclusions, it is strongly recommended that student suggestions from this study should be taken into consideration to create a more anxiety-free learning environment. Assessments of speaking ability should be conducted without students' awareness. The curriculum should be revised to emphasize communication skills and build students' confidence in speaking. There is a need to increase awareness among in-service and pre-service teachers about foreign language speaking anxiety and train them on the impact of their behaviour on student anxiety levels. Further research could explore the effects of variables such as socio-economic differences and past learning experiences. Experimental and longitudinal studies could be conducted to examine different aspects of foreign language speaking anxiety.

These results might open the door to experimental and longitudinal studies that monitor changes in anxiety levels. Educators and researchers can improve their understanding of the individual development trajectories of anxiety in EFL situations by examining how anxiety changes as language learning progresses.

In conclusion, this study contributes valuable insights into the levels of speaking anxiety experienced by EFL learners attending preparatory schools. It underscores the significance of gender differences and identifies potential areas for intervention to help students overcome speaking anxiety and enhance their English communication skills. However, it is important to approach the generalization of the results cautiously due to the limited number of participants in this study.

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