



## Can ambiguity tolerance, success in reading, and gender predict the foreign language reading anxiety?

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### Abstract

The present study focuses on the relationship between reading anxiety and ambiguity tolerance of 295 Turkish EFL learners of English (180 females, 115 males). Data were collected using the Turkish version of FLRAS and SLTAS in 2015-2016 academic year. The overall design of the study was based on the quantitative research method. Data were collected through Second Language Ambiguity Tolerance Scale (SLTAS) and Foreign Language Reading Anxiety Scale (FLRAS). Independent t Tests, Pearson Correlation and multiple regression tests were employed to analyze the data. The results indicated that participants in this research generally have low level of second language ambiguity tolerance and their reading anxiety levels are mostly raised by nature of the text and personal factors. In addition, the research revealed that second language ambiguity tolerance, gender and success in reading in a foreign language are significant and strong predictors of foreign language reading anxiety. Some recommendations were made based on the results of the study. Some recommendations were made in accordance with the findings of the research.

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**Keywords:** Foreign language reading anxiety; English as a foreign language; second language ambiguity tolerance

## 1. Introduction

Success or failure in foreign language acquisition has been attributed to many factors. Attitudes, motivation, self-efficacy, tolerance of ambiguity, and anxiety are cited among them (Ehrman, et. al., 2003). Discovering those factors and the relationship between them will help both teachers and students in teaching and learning processes. While learning a foreign language, learners have to deal with the four skills as reading, writing, speaking and listening. In this process, some students are observed to easily grasp the new language patterns, vocabulary or any explanation of it while some of them desperately try to learn them in a longer period and sometimes lose interest which finally leads them to failure or dropping out the courses. Starting from the early research (Stern, 1983; Stevick, 1999; Ellis, 1994; Oxford, 2001), it has been reported many times in the literature that emotional sides of the learners' are mostly responsible for this result. In this article, two of those aforementioned

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affective factors; anxiety, specifically reading anxiety, and ambiguity tolerance and the relationship between these two variables are analyzed in detail.

### *1.1. Anxiety and foreign language learning*

Barlow (2002), describes anxiety as a frame of mind that is related to one's preparation for imminent negative events. However, anxiety is not a uniform psychological construct in that it is divided into three major types; state anxiety, trait anxiety and situation-specific anxiety (MacIntyre & Gardner, 1989). State anxiety is the feeling of "an apprehension expected at a particular moment in time as a response to a definite situation" (Spielberger, 1983). Trait anxiety, on the other hand, is more of a characteristic trait as its name suggests, which is defined by Levitt (1980) as a permanent condition which does not belong to a particular time. The last type of anxiety, also encompassing foreign language anxiety (MacIntyre & Gardner, 1989; Horwitz et al., 1986), is situation-specific anxiety, which can be defined as a type of anxiety that is limited to the existence of a particular situation (MacIntyre & Gardner, 1991).

Although language anxiety can sometimes work as helpful "energizer" for L2 learning, the harmful effects of anxiety which is considered "debilitating anxiety" (Brown, 1994), cannot be easily ignored in the context of L2 teaching. Studies have shown that foreign language anxiety (FLA) has a significant negative effect on foreign language achievement (Coulombe, 2000; Kim, 2009; Abu-Rabia, 2004; MacIntyre & Doucette, 2010; Woodrow, 2006; Yan & Horwitz, 2008). Moreover, control over the anxiety level is a necessity for the conversion of input into intake (Krashen, 1985). Therefore, it could be stated that FLA is a barrier to the learning of a foreign language and thus it needs to be reduced for a higher level of language achievement (Horwitz, 2008; Richards & Rodgers, 2001).

### *1.2. Reading anxiety in foreign language learning*

Previous studies (Saito, Horwitz, and Garza, 1999; Sellers, 2000; Hsu, 2004; Wu, 2011) revealed that reading anxiety was related to but distinguished from foreign language anxiety.

They also suggest that listening, speaking, reading and writing anxiety, is also related to, but can be distinguished from, language anxiety. For this reason, anxiety levels of language learners for each language skill ought to be handled separately and in detail.

Reading is a complex cognitive process with many mental activities including decoding and comprehension. Writers encode their messages through the text, and the readers get the meaning of the message by decoding it. Furthermore, reading is an inevitable and especially important part of foreign language education. Because learners consciously or unconsciously, are very often confronted with written language both in their daily routine and during in-class language practice activities. Thus, it is considered as the central means for learning new information (Grabe & Stoller, 2001).

However, while learners read texts in a foreign language, they are also trying to decode unfamiliar scripts, writing system, and cultural materials. So, it is inevitable that they experience difficulty in processing them and they may get frustrated with reading which causes anxiety. As a result, anxiety, caused by reading in a foreign language, may sometimes lead to poor language achievement (Saito, et al., 199).

### *1.3. Overcoming reading anxiety*

Since most studies concluded that students with higher language anxiety in general or in specific language skills are apt to have lower performance in foreign language learning, the sources of anxiety or the strategies to cope with anxiety have not been ignored and have been the subjects of many studies. As a result, researchers have offered different methods and ideas to cope with the anxiety, which negatively affects the learning process, such as whole person learning perspective of Curran (1982) and affective filter hypothesis of Krashen (1982). Moreover, the most frequently cited recommendation to minimize anxiety was investigating and being aware of anxiety provoking situations. As summarized by Turula (2002), to eliminate or alleviate the language anxiety and loss of self-confidence in the classroom, teachers must be aware of the anxiety raising situations and understand the traits of good classroom dynamics.

In the recent years, the significance of foreign language ambiguity tolerance for EFL learners has gained importance as an alleviator of anxiety and some new studies were conducted (El-Koumy, 2000; Erten and Topkaya, 2009; Kamran and Maftoon, 2012). Some of those previous studies conducted in this area of research indicated that foreign language ambiguity tolerance has a correlation with anxiety levels of learners and also has a strong positive correlation with success in foreign language learning in some ways.

### *1.4. Ambiguity Tolerance in foreign language learning*

Ambiguity is usually experienced in situations that are likely to be unfamiliar, complex, contradicted, and unstructured. So, foreign language ambiguity tolerance can be interpreted as the willingness to comprehend, deal with, and interpret ambiguous language information and the ability to perform well in a situation the linguistic stimuli of which are not clear enough (Chappelle and Roberts, 1986). However, it is defined by Brown (2000:119) as "the degree to which you are cognitively willing to tolerate ideas and propositions that run counter to your own belief system or structure of knowledge".

Hadley, (2003) suggests that the degree to which a person is cognitively willing to tolerate ideas and propositions that are against his belief system or knowledge marks the person's tolerance of ambiguity. According to him, ambiguity tolerant people may enjoy creative possibilities without being cognitively or affectively disturbed by ambiguity and uncertainty. In other words, a person having a high level of ambiguity tolerance has the ability to deal with uncertainty in a more comfortable way than the person having a low tolerance. Additionally, a person having a low ambiguity tolerance might experience anxiety and easily get frustrated when encountering an activity with new and unknown elements that involve ambiguity or difficulty. In language learning, facing too much new information and contradiction, the learners sometimes might be led to strong negative affective reactions such as anxiety.

Additionally, Stoycheva (2003) argues that tolerance of ambiguity is an important source of creativity. First of all, creative work requires the ability to tolerate ambiguities. While creating something new, individuals need to accept and learn to cope with anxiety and psychological discomfort caused by the high demands of the task. Moreover, tolerance of ambiguity integrates the basic qualities of creativity and humor to keeps a balance between resistance and adaptation that characterize creativity. It is also important to control the tendency to jump directly to easy, simple, and unambiguous solutions upon encountering hard tasks. "Resistance to premature closure and psychological openness are beneficial to the creative process, allowing time and space for a free and flexible exploration of the incoming information". Finally, ambiguity tolerance might help individuals to make important decisions since decision-making process requires generating, evaluating, selecting

and implementing solutions. Tolerating ambiguity helps to be open to various alternatives and avoid insisting on a single option.

### *1.5. Research on Reading Anxiety and Ambiguity Tolerance*

The relationship between uncertainty and anxiety has best been described by William Gudykunst's (2005) anxiety management (AUM) theory. Gudykunst focuses on what makes up effective communication between cultural in-groups and strangers, in other words, "situations where differences between interlocutors spawn doubts and fears" (Griffin, 2011, p. 427). Anxiety management theory emphasizes that "effective communication is possible only when participants' levels of anxiety and uncertainty fall somewhere between those upper and lower thresholds" (Griffin, 2011, p. 431). In other words, success in foreign language can be gained if the learner can have a moderate level of anxiety and tolerance of ambiguity.

The relationship between ambiguity tolerance and foreign language learning has been studied in various perspectives and provided invaluable contribution to the field. Some studies were conducted to see the effect of ambiguity tolerance on the learners' academic achievement on four main language skills, attitudes towards language learning, vocabulary retention, strategy use, foreign language classroom anxiety, reading anxiety, listening anxiety, speaking anxiety and writing anxiety. First of all, early studies conducted by Chappelle (1983), Ely (1995), Oxford (1999) indicated a positive relationship between ambiguity tolerance and learners' academic achievement in language learning as well as the contemporary ones such as Griffiths (2004), Yang & Wang (2009), Basoz, (2015). Moreover, El-Koumy (2003), Liu and Sun (2005), Erten and Topkaya (2009), Keshavarz and Assar (2009), Li (2010), Liu (2011) Kamran and Maftoon (2012) investigated the relation between foreign language reading comprehension and ambiguity tolerance and suggested that moderate level of tolerance of ambiguity facilitates foreign language learning after finding a positive correlation between tolerance of ambiguity and students' overall reading comprehension proficiency. In addition, Oxford (1999) Matsuura (2007), Awan et al., (2010), Dewaele, (2013) came to a conclusion that EFL learners having higher level of ambiguity tolerance might have less anxiety.

Since the aforementioned literature suggests, learners' ambiguity tolerance level has the power to decrease their foreign language classroom anxiety and indirectly foster success in language studies. Taking the relevant literature into account, the aim of the present study is to search for a relationship between the ambiguity tolerance levels of language learners and their reading anxiety levels in a Turkish EFL context as well as the effects of background information on them. For this purpose the research focused on the following research questions:

How tolerant are Turkish EFL learners of second language ambiguity and what is their foreign language reading anxiety level?

Does foreign language reading anxiety differ in terms of gender, academic success in reading in a foreign language and ambiguity tolerance?

Do gender, success in reading in a foreign language and second language ambiguity tolerance predict foreign language reading anxiety?

## 2. Method

The overall design of the present study was based on the quantitative research method and it was designed to investigate the relationship between ambiguity tolerance and reading anxiety levels of EFL learners and the effects of gender and reading academic success on their ambiguity tolerance levels.

### 2.1. Sample / Participants

Of the 295 participants, 115 were male (39%) and 180 were female (61%). Their ages ranged from 18 to 28 years with the median score of 19.46 (SD=1.29). In the university where the research was performed, one year English education is offered to freshmen before they start their subject field in their own department. All the students are at elementary level and are supposed to be at intermediate level at the end of the school year. During the preparatory school year, which involves 28 weeks, students receive 24 hours of English instruction per week including four language skills (reading, writing, listening, and speaking) as detached courses. As for the grades of the students in their reading course, of the students, 100 (34%) of them reported that they got a score below 60 and were found to be unsuccessful while 194 (66%) of them reported that they got a score above 60 and found to be successful according to the regulations of the school which accept 60 as the cut off point for the academic success in each course at the school of foreign languages.

### 2.2. Instrument(s)

In the present research, two main questionnaires and a background information were used to gather the data. The first questionnaire was the Second Language Tolerance of Ambiguity Scale (SLTAS) developed by Ely (1995). This survey was designed as a 4-point Likert scale with 12 items as “strongly agree”, “agree”, “disagree”, and “strongly disagree”. The second questionnaire was Foreign Language Reading Anxiety Scale (FLRAS) which was specifically designed to assess the elementary level Turkish EFL learners’ foreign language reading anxiety levels and developed by (Sahin, 2011). This questionnaire was preferred to be used in this study since it was especially designed for Turkish EFL learners and the similarities between the participants especially in terms of their levels of English proficiency (elementary). The FLRA Scale was reported to be prepared on the basis of some studies such as Foreign Language Listening Anxiety Scale (FLLAS) by Kim (2000); The Foreign Language Reading Anxiety Scale (FLRAS) by Saito, Garza and Horwitz (1999); The Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (FLCAS) by Horwitz, Horwitz and Cope (1986); and Fear of Negative Evaluation Scale (FNE) by Leary (1983) (cited in Sahin, 2011). It comprised of 16 items referring to foreign language reading anxiety provoking factors. The Cronbach’s Alpha coefficient value was reported as 0.83 for the original version of the questionnaire (Sahin, 2011). In Foreign Language Reading Anxiety Scale, learners responded to each item using a five-point Likert scale ranging from "strongly agree" to "strongly disagree." Foreign Language Reading Anxiety Scale assesses reading anxiety of learners in five main areas as anxiety caused by reading tasks (2 items), anxiety caused by the attitude of the teacher (1 item), anxiety caused by the nature of the text (3 items), anxiety caused by personal factors (9 items), anxiety caused by the classroom environment (1item). The Cronbach’s Alpha coefficient values were calculated for both of the scales and were found as 0.83 for SLTAS and 0.86 for FLRAS which are quite satisfying since the minimum level is recommended to be 0.70 by Pallant (2005).

### 2.3. Data collection procedures

Data for the study was collected during the 2015-2016 academic year from the students of different faculties attending the School of Foreign Languages. Firstly, all the subjects had been informed verbally that their participation in the study was completely voluntary and would not influence their grade in the courses. Following this, they were asked to fill in the questionnaire about the study. Of the students 300 of them participated in the study voluntarily and 295 of the questionnaires were involved in the study. Five of the questionnaires were excluded due to some missing information.

### 2.4. Data analysis

A quantitative research methodology was followed and a descriptive survey study was conducted. After collecting the completed questionnaire, all the data were coded and then analyzed through the Statistical Package for Social Science (SPSS17.0). To be more specific, firstly, descriptive statistics such as frequencies, means, and standard deviations were computed to display the subjects' overall responses to the Second Language Tolerance of Ambiguity Scale (SLTAS) and Foreign Language Reading Anxiety Scale (FLRAS) items. Secondly, t-test, correlation analysis, and regression analysis were conducted.

## 3. Results

The results of the research will be organized in accordance with the research questions.

*How tolerant are Turkish EFL learners of second language ambiguity and what is their foreign language reading anxiety level?*

This research question was analyzed by frequencies, means and standard deviations. Table 1 shows the group means and standard deviations in descending order. Additionally, the overall second language ambiguity tolerance score (SLTAS) of the subjects was found to be 27.82 ( $M=2.31$  and  $SD=0.57$ ). The score obtained through the Second Language Ambiguity Tolerance Scale ranges from 12 to 48 and since 1 means “strongly agree”, 2 means “agree”, 3 means “disagree”, and 4 means “strongly disagree” in the scale, the lower the score; the more intolerant learners are in terms of English Language ambiguities. Hence, considering the 12-48 scoring continuum of SLTAS, the subjects overall SLTAS is located towards the lower end of the continuum indicating a low level of ambiguity tolerance. This finding has been confirmed by Kazamina, (1999); Erten and Topkaya (2009), Cabello (2011) and Abbas (2016) whose research also emphasized low level of second language ambiguity tolerance of EFL learners. However, studies indicating an average level of ambiguity tolerance also exists (Basoz, 2015).

As can be seen in Table 1, the SLTAS scores of the subjects vary between 2.10 and 2.59 and no scores are found ranging either between 1 and 2 or between 3 and 4 which indicate quite high and quite low levels. In all the items they seem to locate around the midpoint of the 1-4 scoring continuum. The subjects scored lowest in the items that mainly focus on tolerating the ambiguities related to the productive language skills such as writing and speaking (items 10, 3, 8, 7). This indicates that Turkish EFL learners are less tolerant of the ambiguities about not being able to express themselves while either speaking or writing in their foreign language studies. Conversely, the subjects scored in the items (9, 6, 12, 1, 2) that mainly focus on tolerating the ambiguities related to the receptive skills such as reading and listening highest. So, this indicates that Turkish EFL learners are more tolerant of the

ambiguities about understanding when they listen and read. Likewise, they do not seem to be good at tolerating the ambiguities related to grammar, vocabulary and pronunciation (items 5, 4, 11).

**Table 1.** Means and Standard deviations for the items of the SLTAS

ITEM	ITEMS	N	MEAN	SD
NO				
9	It bothers me when the teacher uses an English word I don't know.	294	2.59	0.95
6	I don't enjoy reading something in English that takes a while to figure out completely.	295	2.57	0.95
12	One thing I don't like about reading in English is having to guess what the meaning is.	295	2.51	0.98
1	When I'm reading something in English, I feel impatient when I don't totally understand the meaning.	295	2.46	0.98
2	It bothers me that I don't understand everything the teacher says in English.	293	2.35	1.03
5	I don't like the feeling that my English pronunciation is not quite correct.	295	2.29	0.95
4	It is frustrating that sometimes I don't understand completely some English grammar.	295	2.28	0.95
11	I don't like the fact that sometimes I can't find English words that mean the same as some words in my own language.	295	2.23	0.95
7	It bothers me that even though I study English grammar some of it is hard to use in speaking and writing.	294	2.18	0.98
8	When I'm writing in English, I don't like the fact that I can't say exactly what I want.	294	2.11	0.92
3	When I write English compositions, I don't like it when I can't express my ideas exactly	294	2.10	0.94
10	When I'm speaking in English, I feel uncomfortable if I can't communicate my idea clearly.	294	2.10	0.94

As for the reading anxiety, since there are 16 items in the FLRAS, the possible range of score is 16 to 80 and higher score indicates more anxiety on the learners' part. Mean and standard deviations of the subjects' overall foreign language reading anxiety score and five sub-dimensions of reading anxiety were presented in descending order in Table 2. Looking at the means of the subscales in the table, it can be said that students have varying degrees of reading anxiety. Firstly, the means in the subscales suggest that (Table 2), students' reading anxiety is the highest in the items related to the nature of the text. Students seem to choose to read the texts that they are familiar with and that they think they can understand easily by looking at the appearance or genre of the text. The second sub-dimension that provokes reading anxiety of foreign language learners involves the items related to personal factors such as reader's interest in and discourse knowledge about the text and the proficiency in English language and reading skill. In other words, learners' anxiety levels increase while reading in English if the learners encounter with the words and grammatical patterns that they do not have a command of or they simply get anxious by just being in a situation which requires reading something lengthy or authentic in English. Thirdly, the sub-dimension which raises reading anxiety level of the EFL learners is the item related to the attitude of the teacher. It implies that, instructors' characteristics and their attitudes towards learners either provokes or alleviates the reading anxiety level. This item draws the attention to the expectations of the learners from the instructors as a guide to help them cope with the reading anxiety caused by perceived difficulty of reading material. It seems that students may sometimes perceive themselves insufficient to comprehend the texts without

teachers' support and if they do not get adequate help from the teacher they feel anxious. The next sub-dimension which has the second lowest reading anxiety score involves the items related to the reading tasks. The items involve the fear of making mistakes while doing the comprehension activities related to the text as well as being evaluated negatively in terms of English language abilities and proficiency by the instructors. Finally, the sub-dimension which has the lowest reading anxiety score concerns one item related to classroom environment such as being negatively evaluated by the peers. It seems that EFL learners relatively get less anxious by the reactions of and perceptions of the other learners in the classroom setting (Table 2).

**Table 2.** Means and standard deviations for the sub-dimensions of FLRAS

SUB-DIMENSIONS OF FLRAS	N	MEAN	SD
Anxiety caused by the nature of the text.	295	2.96	0.95
Anxiety caused by personal factors.	294	2.93	0.81
Anxiety caused by the attitude of the teacher.	295	2.88	1.26
Anxiety caused by reading tasks.	295	2.77	1.08
Anxiety caused by the classroom environment.	295	2.58	1.34
Overall reading anxiety	295	2.87	0.74

When previous the literature is investigated, it is possible to encounter lots of studies reporting that foreign language learners, in different contexts, experience foreign language reading anxiety in varying degrees (Saito et al., 1999; Huang, 2001; Zhang, 2002; Shi & Liu, 2006) as well as the studies reporting that foreign language reading anxiety is just related to the perceived difficulty level of the reading material and following reading tasks (Brantmeier, 2005). Moreover, grammar, new words, assessment tasks and worry about the reading are among the most frequently cited sources of foreign language reading anxiety (e.g., Huang, 2001; Zhang, 2002; Shi & Liu, 2006).

*Does foreign language reading anxiety differ in terms of gender, academic success, and ambiguity tolerance in reading in a foreign language?*

An independent T test shows that gender has an important role in foreign language reading anxiety of EFL learners. As revealed by Table 3, in four of the sub-dimensions a statistically significant difference was determined in favor of males. Females seem to have more reading anxiety caused by nature of the text, personal factors, attitude of the instructor, and reading tasks. The only factor that does not have a significant factor is anxiety caused by classroom environment.

Contrary to the results of many studies suggesting that males usually have higher reading anxiety (Scales & Rhee, 2001; Lynch, 2002), in the current research females' reading anxiety is higher in all the sub-dimensions. However, as indicated by a number of researchers, such as Bracken and Crain (1994), Plancherel and Bolognini (1995), Aydın (2008) Jafarigohar and Behrooznia, (2012) females do not seem to be successful at dealing with their emotional disturbance such as anxiety in reading a foreign language. On the one hand, the reason is suggested to be complex interpersonal relationships that the adolescents have and the peer pressure that is felt more by the females. That is to say, females concern the evaluation of their peers more than males and therefore feel more anxious in their studies in the classroom settings. On the other hand, it may also be explained in the traditional Turkish cultural context which suggests that males are likely to refrain from expressing their fears or

weaknesses owing to the roles they undertake in the society as strong or powerful though it is fading away.

**Table 3.** Foreign language reading anxiety in terms of gender

VARIABLES	GENDER	N	MEAN	SD	t/F Value*	P
Anxiety caused by the nature of the text.	Female	180	3.08	0.91	2.76	0.00*
	Male	115	2.77	0.98		
Anxiety caused by personal factors.	Female	179	3.06	0.82	3.62	0.00*
	Male	115	2.72	0.75		
Anxiety caused by the attitude of the teacher.	Female	180	3.03	1.26	2.60	0.01*
	Male	115	2.64	1.24		
Anxiety caused by reading tasks.	Female	180	2.93	1.08	3.17	0.00*
	Male	115	2.52	1.03		
Anxiety caused by the classroom environment.	Female	180	2.72	1.35	1.94	0.53
	Male	115	2.40	1.32		

As for the success of the students in their reading in English course, the independent T test indicates that successful and unsuccessful EFL learners differed significantly in their reading anxiety levels in terms of the nature of the text, personal factors, the attitudes of the instructors, and reading tasks. However, anxiety caused by classroom environment is not a significant factor in students' success either (Table 4).

This finding has been confirmed by MacIntyre (1995) who emphasized the negative effects of anxiety pervading the entire language learning process. Studies in different specific language skill anxiety have also indicated that high levels of anxiety could have adverse effects on students' overall foreign language performance and also on the special language skills (Saito & Samimy, 1996; Cheng et al., 1999; Sellers, 2000). In addition, Saito, et. al. (1999), Sellers, (2000), Shi and Liu, (2006), Gonen (2009) and Zhao (2009) have put forward that foreign language reading anxiety interferes with both the reading process and the reading performance as in the case of current research. Yet, it is possible to mention about some studies reporting a lack of significant relationship between reading anxiety and success in reading such as Brantmeier, (2005) and Mills, et. al., (2006).

**Table 4.** Foreign language reading anxiety in terms of academic achievement

VARIABLES	READING SUCCESS	N	MEAN	SD	t/F* Value	P
Anxiety caused by the nature of the text.	Unsuccessful	100	3.19	0.94	2.97	0.00
	Successful	194	2.84	0.94		
Anxiety caused by personal factors.	Unsuccessful	100	3.16	0.83	3.60	0.00
	Successful	193	2.81	0.77		
Anxiety caused by the attitude of the teacher.	Unsuccessful	100	3.29	1.27	4.10	0.00
	Successful	194	2.66	1.21		
Anxiety caused by reading tasks.	Unsuccessful	100	3.04	1.10	3.06	0.00
	Successful	194	2.63	1.05		
Anxiety caused by the classroom environment.	Unsuccessful	100	2.77	1.36	1.62	0.10
	Successful	194	2.50	1.33		

Correlational analyses revealed the relationships between foreign language reading anxiety and second language ambiguity tolerance (Table 5). According to the table, the second language ambiguity tolerance score of the students was significantly and negatively correlated with two dimensions with coefficients ranging from -0.118 to -0.114 ( $P < .01$ ). Namely, a less ambiguity tolerant learner seems to be more likely to have higher reading anxiety caused by the nature of the text and personal factors. When the coefficients are evaluated it can be said that there is statistically significant, but weak relationship.

This result seems to confirm that learners having high ambiguity tolerance levels may deal with uncertainty fairly comfortably, whereas learners with low tolerance suffer from anxiety when encountering a task that seem ambiguous or difficult as suggested by Hadley (2003). Likewise, El-Koumy (2000) supported evidence with her research that AT is very closely related to anxiety, since learners with low AT end up panicking. She also suggested that it might be useful to tolerate ambiguity only to a certain extent, since “too tolerant” readers seem to take unnecessary risks and become careless with their reading.

**Table 5.** Pearson Correlation between FLRA and SLAT

VARIABLES	N	PEARSON CORRELATION	P
Anxiety caused by the nature of the text.	289	-0.118	0.04
Anxiety caused by personal factors.	288	-0.114	0.05
Anxiety caused by the attitude of the teacher.	289	-0.073	0.21
Anxiety caused by reading tasks.	289	-0.087	0.13
Anxiety caused by the classroom environment.	289	-0.047	0.42

*Do gender, success in reading in a foreign language and second language ambiguity tolerance predict foreign language reading anxiety?*

The analyses so far clearly support the conclusion that foreign language reading anxiety and second language ambiguity tolerance is related to each other in some ways. However, the results of the correlational analyses show numerous bivariate relationships, which could not indicate the influence of one variable on another. To get better clues about the effects of the dimensions of reading anxiety on ambiguity tolerance, multiple regression analysis was conducted. A stepwise method was employed in forming regression models to determine if ambiguity tolerance, gender, and success in foreign language reading predict reading anxiety of EFL learners (Table 6). It was determined that second language ambiguity tolerance, success in reading in a foreign language and gender are significant predictors of foreign language learners' motivation.

**Table 6.** Summary for Stepwise Regression Analysis of Foreign language reading anxiety

Mo del	R	R <sup>2</sup>	R <sup>2</sup> adj	SE	R <sup>2</sup> chg	Fchg	Df1/2	Fchg	β	VIF
1	0.234 <sup>a</sup>	0.05	0.052	0.731	0.055	16.55	1/285	0.000	-0.234	1.000
2	0.314 <sup>b</sup>	0.09	0.092	0.715	0.044	13.71	1/284	0.000	-0.210	1.011
3	0.336 <sup>c</sup>	0.11	0.103	0.711	0.014	4.59	1/283	0.033	-0.120	1.000

- 
- a. Predictors: (Constant), CİNSİYET
  - b. Predictors: (Constant), CİNSİYET, RC
  - c. Predictors: (Constant), CİNSİYET, RC, AMB-TOL
  - d. Dependent Variable: ANX-READ
- 

Three models were generated and all were resulted with the change in  $R^2$  being significant (Table 6). Three of the variables gender ( $t: -4.068$   $p: 0.00$ ), success in reading in a foreign language ( $t: -3.704$   $p: 0.00$ ), and second language ambiguity tolerance ( $t: -2.144$   $p: 0.03$ ), were found to be significant predictors of reading anxiety in a foreign language. Among these three significant variables, gender was found to be the most significant predictor of students' reading anxiety in a foreign language ( $\beta = -0.234$ ) as suggested by model 1 and it alone explained 23% of the variance. In model 2, as can be seen, 31.4% of the variance was explained by gender and success in reading in a foreign language ( $\beta = -0.251$ ). In model 3, three of the predictors, namely gender, success in reading, and ambiguity tolerance, explained 33.6% of the variance ( $\beta = -0.120$ ). Model 3 seems to explain the relationship best. Success in reading and ambiguity tolerance are negative predictors of reading anxiety (Table 6) since the evidence suggests an inverse relationship between them; as success in reading and level of ambiguity tolerance increase, the reading anxiety declines or vice versa.

The most striking finding is the strength of gender on reading anxiety while it is possible to encounter studies suggesting no relationship between gender and foreign language reading anxiety (Zhao et.al., 2013; Joo and Damron, 2015; Wu, 2011).

#### 4. Conclusions

This study sought to gain greater insight into the second language ambiguity tolerance and foreign language reading anxiety levels of Turkish EFL learners. It also attempted to assess the effect of second language ambiguity tolerance, success in reading in a foreign language and gender on reading anxiety. Conclusions drawn on the basis of the analysis make certain propositions as follows.

Firstly, it was seen that Turkish EFL learners do not appear to tolerate ambiguity related to their foreign language studies well since their low level of ambiguity tolerance. Hence, it can be concluded that Turkish EFL learners may have rigid mental theories about the world, emotions of anxiety and discomfort, operations towards the target of ambiguity, and avoidance behavior as claimed by Budner (1962). However, this can also weaken their joy, interest, and success in their foreign language studies and hinder them to remove the complexities of the activities in EFL studies. This may lead the learners, who cannot tolerate the ambiguities reasonably, to experience a stressful situation in which language learning, risk taking, and application of the appropriate strategies may be negatively influenced.

Secondly, the research revealed that EFL learners mainly feel anxiety while reading due to the nature of the text and personal factors. This particularly draws attention to the materials that are being used in reading courses, students' needs, and interests. Students seem to be exhausted by reading materials that are not convenient to their proficiency level, interest, needs, and background knowledge. Additionally, struggling with lengthy passages involving too many new words and unknown grammar patterns during reading is likely to be the principal causes of reading anxiety. Another factor which has been rated as an anxiety provoking factor by learners is the attitude of the teacher. Students obviously express the need for instructors' support to cope with reading anxiety. Therefore, this conclusion emphasizes the importance of raising both pre-service and in-service teachers' awareness levels of foreign language anxiety that is experienced by EFL learners as suggested by (Aydın, 2008).

In addition, the importance of good communication between teachers and learners to allow EFL learners to express their feelings becomes prominent (Aydın, 2007).

Thirdly, the study has illustrated that females and students who are not successful in their reading courses seem to suffer more by the factors causing anxiety in reading in a foreign language. It can be concluded that whatever the reason is, as aforementioned, either the females' fear of being negatively evaluated by their peers or cultural reasons that encumber the boys to seem strong, females are weaker in coping with anxiety provoking factors in reading in a foreign language and need extra support. In addition, the relationship between students' success and their reading anxiety is not surprising to the researcher at all after diagnosing the anxiety levels of the learners in the research. Unsuccessful learners are likely to perceive themselves as incapable of comprehending the text or doing the tasks which eventually end up with raised anxiety.

Finally, the foremost conclusion in the research is that the research has provided evidence that second language ambiguity tolerance, success in reading in a foreign language, and gender are strong predictors of foreign language reading anxiety. At this point, research has emphasized the intertwined connections between second language ambiguity tolerance, success in reading in a foreign language, and gender and reading anxiety. It should be noted here that ambiguity tolerance is a negative predictor of reading anxiety. This means that ambiguity tolerance is a variable that is needed in foreign language reading process and, when employed, can alleviate reading anxiety and facilitate the complex nature of foreign language.

Based on the conclusions related to the research, it is recommended that ambiguity tolerance could be supported and promoted during foreign language education in order to provide the EFL learners with skills and styles of approach that allow them to successfully operate reading in a foreign language. For this purpose, it is strongly recommended that the behavior patterns of ambiguity tolerance or intolerance and their underlying origins and processes of development ought to be recognized and diagnosed in future studies. To alleviate the reading anxiety, EFL learners might be thought to be actively involved in the process of selecting and adopting appropriate reading materials for the class. Besides, learners' proficiency level, interests, joys, needs, and background knowledge must be considered as well as content, relevance and authenticity of the text cautiously. To attract the attention of university students, the reading material used in the course could be relevant for the future professional lives and related to real world reading purposes of the learners. Additionally, EFL teachers should clearly convey the objectives in each activity in order to ensure that everyone has understood what they are doing and why. As a strong indicator of foreign language reading anxiety, the gender is likely to be affected by many other variables such as sociocultural backgrounds and reading beliefs. Hence, it might be suggested to replicate the study in different cultural context with the learners from different age groups and proficiency levels. Considering the results of the study related to the relationship between ambiguity tolerance and reading anxiety, it might be a good idea to search for the relationship between ambiguity tolerance and listening, speaking, and writing anxiety of foreign language learners in different contexts. As a final note on the limitations of the research, it needs to be noted that this current research was conducted with Turkish EFL learners in the School of foreign languages in a state university and results cannot be generalized for all the language learners in different contexts.

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## Belirsizlik Hoşgörüsü, Okuma Başarısı ve Cinsiyet Yabancı Dilde Okuma Kaygısını Yordayabilir mi?

### Öz

Bu çalışma öncelikle yabancı dilde okuma kaygısı ve belirsizlik hoşgörüsü arasındaki ilişki üzerinde yoğunlaşmaktadır. Bu amaçla, çalışmaya 180 kadın ve 115 erkek olmak üzere 295 İngilizceyi yabancı dil olarak öğrenen öğrenci dahil edilmiştir. Çalışmada Yabancı Okuma Kaygısını Belirleme Ölçeği'nin Türkçe versiyonu ile İkinci Yabancı Dil Belirsizlik Hoşgörüsü Ölçeği kullanılmıştır. Çalışma, niceliksel araştırma yönteminde planlanmıştır. İstatistiksel analizlerde t testi, Pearson korelasyon analizi ve çoklu regresyon analizlerinden yararlanılmıştır. Sonuçlar, katılımcıların genel olarak düşük belirsizlik hoşgörüsüne sahip olduklarını ve yabancı dilde okuma kaygısını çeşitli düzeylerde yaşadığını göstermiştir. Buna göre, İngilizceyi yabancı dil olarak öğrenen öğrencilerin okuma kaygılarının büyük ölçüde okuma parçasının yapısı, kişisel faktörler ve öğretmenin sınıf içindeki tutumundan kaynaklandığı görülmüştür. Ayrıca çalışma, istatistiksel analizler sonucunda, ikinci yabancı dil belirsizlik hoşgörüsü, okuma başarısı ve cinsiyetin, yabancı dilde okuma kaygısının güçlü yordayıcıları olduğu sonucuna varılmıştır. Araştırmanın sonuçlarından yola çıkılarak, çeşitli önerilere yer verilmiştir.

*Anahtar sözcükler:* Yabancı dilde okuma kaygısı, ikinci yabancı dil belirsizlik hoşgörüsü, yabancı dil olarak İngilizce öğretimi

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