# The Predictor Roles of Speaking Anxiety and English Self Efficacy on Foreign Language Speaking Anxiety

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#### **Abstract**

This study is concerned with the relationships between foreign language speaking anxiety and demographic factors among undergraduate students. The study also attempts at predicting the roles of speaking anxiety and English self-efficacy on foreign language speaking anxiety. Versions of previously published scale (Speaking Anxiety Scale, Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety and Self-Efficacy Scale for English) were administered to 205 the participants enrolled in a Turkish private university. The findings revealed that foreign language speaking anxiety was negatively correlated with two variables related to prior foreign language experience as well as having a foreign friend. Following this, data analysis did not indicate any significant differences regarding spending a week or longer abroad and foreign language speaking anxiety. Finally, the results showed strong correlation between speaking anxiety and English self-efficacy on foreign language speaking anxiety. Based on these findings, the study suggested implications about how to reduce foreign language speaking anxiety in undergraduate students.

**Key Words:** Foreign language speaking anxiety; prior foreign language experience; experience abroad; having an English speaking friend; speaking anxiety; English self-efficacy

#### Introduction

In the past few decades, a great deal of research has highlighted the construct of anxiety as one of the most important affective variables during the second or/and foreign language learning process (Brown, 1987; Chastain, 1976; MacIntyre & Gardner, 1991). Although there have been various definitions of anxiety, they all share a common ground referring to this particular construct as an unpleasant emotional condition characterized by feelings of tension and apprehension. Based on these negative connotations, anxiety has a debilitating effect on any kind of learning process including second/foreign language learning which is highly affected by various affective variables (Bailey, 1983; Cheng, 1994; Chang, 2001; Horwitz, Horwitz, & Cope, 1986; MacIntyre & Gardner, 1991; Onwuegbuzie, et al. 1999). In light of these observations, foreign language anxiety has been highly investigated by different researchers in the field of education.

Horwitz, Horwitz and Hope (1986) made a valuable contribution and defined language anxiety as "a distinct complex of self perceptions, feelings and behaviours related to classroom language learning arising from the uniqueness of the language learning process" (p. 127). They described anxiety comprising three interrelated com-

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munication apprehension, fear of negative evaluation, and test anxiety. Communication apprehension is described as "a type of shyness characterized by fear of or anxiety about communicating with people" (p. 127). The second components, fear of negative evaluation refers to the "apprehension about others' evaluation, avoidance of evaluation situations, and the expectation that others would evaluate oneself negatively " (p. 128). Finally, text anxiety is "a type of performance anxiety stemming from a fear of failure" (p. 128) as a result of language tests and examinations entrance.

The findings of Horwitz, Horwitz and Hope (1986) have led a number of researchers to investigate foreign language (FL) anxiety in education (Aida, 1994; Cheng, 2001; Gregersen, 2003; Horwitz, Horwitz, & Cope, 1986; Phillips, 2005). Students in language classrooms generally report that speaking in the target language (e.g. English) is one of the most anxiety producing experiences.

Given that learners' feelings and experiences affect their ability to learn, research has mainly focused on classroom based foreign language speaking anxiety. Price (1991), for example, reported that speaking in front of their peers provokes anxiety in foreign language learners as they are afraid of making mistakes and being laughed at. Similar results were obtained by Pertaub, Slater and Carter (2001) stating that anxiety is fostered when speakers have to deliver a speech in the foreign language or talk to foreigners as they experience the fear of being judged or humiliated by others.

Recent studies conducted by Liu (2007) and Liu and Jackson (2008) reported that foreign language anxiety has negative impact on the willingness of students to communicate in classrooms. The two research studies showed that factors such as lack of vocabulary, low English proficiency and memory disassociation lead to anxiety. Therefore, the teachers should be aware of the existence of speaking anxiety in FL classrooms and show empathy to their students.

In a similar vein, Tsiplakides and Keramida (2009) found that due to the fear of negative evaluation as well as perception of low ability, students experience speaking anxiety in English language classrooms. As a result, Koch and Terell (1991) concluded that activities such as giving oral presentations, doing role-plays and defining words are among the most anxiety provoking factors in the classroom setting.

Apart from the research on foreign language anxiety related to speaking and listening skills, recent research has emphasized the role of anxiety regarding the other language skills. Specifically, in their studies, Hilleson (1996), Cheng et al. (1999) and Saito et al. (1990) investigated the relationship of anxiety between foreign language anxiety and reading and writing skills. The findings of both studies revealed foreign language reading and writing anxiety are highly correlated, though they are more specific types of anxiety compared to the speaking anxiety. In a similar study, Cheng et al. (1999) looked for the relationship between FL classroom anxiety as well as their association with FL speaking and writing achievement. The findings suggested that FL classroom anxiety is a more general type of anxiety whereas FL writing anxiety is a

more language skill specific one. Finally, low self-confidence was an influential factor in both types of anxiety.

In addition, research has also highlighted impact of speaking anxiety on other domains, including, language achievement, learners' actual proficiency and performance, gender, prior foreign language experience, negative evaluation and self-evaluation.

Considering the Turkish EFL context, Dalkılıç (2001) investigated the relationship between the FL anxiety and achievement of Turkish freshmen EFL learners in their speaking courses. The findings revealed a strong correlation between the participating students' anxiety levels and their success in the course. In addition, Ay (2010) stated that students feel more anxious when they are required to speak without being prepared.

Another factor closely related to FL anxiety is learners' actual proficiency and performance. The research findings have yielded conflicting results. While a number of studies show the positive effects of anxiety (Bailey, 1983; MacIntyre & Gardner, 1994; Brown, et al., 2001), the negative relationship between the two factors has also been reported (Aida, 1994; Chiang, 2007; MacIntyre & Gardner, 1991; Philips, 1991). Finally, in his study on the relationship between proficiency level and degree of FL speaking anxiety, Balemir (2009) found a moderate level of speaking anxiety among Turkish EFL university students.

Gender also seemed to play a pivotal role in FL anxiety. The obtained results of the studies conducted by MacIntyre et al. (2002) and Park and French (2013) reported that female learners regard FL speaking as more nerve-wrecking than their male counterparts. Similarly, in Turkey, the findings of Öztürk and Gürnüz's (2012) study revealed that gender has impact on foreign language speaking anxiety; particularly females are more anxious while speaking in the target language. In a more recent study, Tercan and Dikilitas (2015) stated that female students feel more anxious than male students if they do not prepare for the lessons beforehand. On the contrary, Bozavli and Gülmez (2012) found higher anxiety among the male learners when compared with their female peers. As a result, the impact of gender on FL anxiety has revealed inconsistent findings.

Furthermore, a number of studies emphasized the relationship between anxiety and prior language learning experience (Baker & MacIntrye, 2000; Gardner et al., 1979) The findings revealed that anxiety level decreases after students spend some time in the target language environment. In other words, students show more confidence and higher perceived competence after being engaged in immersion programs.

Negative evaluation is another factor that has influence on speaking anxiety in FL classrooms. Öztürk and Gürbüz (2014) investigated the major causes of FL anxiety in Turkish EFL classrooms. Although the quantitative data showed that the participants generally experience low level of English speaking anxiety, the qualitative results demonstrated opposite findings. Based on the students' excerpts, pronunciation,

immediate questions, fears of making mistakes as well as negative evaluation are the major causes of speaking anxiety which the teacher should take into consideration in their language classrooms.

Kitano (2001) carried out another study looking at the two potential causes of anxiety namely, negative evaluation and self-perceived speaking ability. Data collected from the Japanese university students showed that an individual student's anxiety was higher as his/her fear of negative evaluation was stronger. In addition, male students were more anxious as they perceived themselves less competent. Finally, the findings reported that the fear of negative evaluation and self-perceived speaking ability did not interact and had no influence on the individual student's anxiety level.

MacIntyre et al. (1998) found a close relationship between FL anxiety and self-evaluation proposing the two constructs as a single one namely, self-confidence. More specifically, Matsuda and Gobel (2001) found a strong link between low self-confidence while speaking English and confidence/enjoyment in reading. Similar results were obtained from the studies conducted by Garner et al. (1977) and Spezzini and Oxford (1998) which pinpointed the relationship between foreign language anxiety and learners' actual proficiency and performance.

Apart from the causal factors of anxiety, many researchers came up with several intervention strategies. For example, Tsiplakides and Keramide (2009) examined the characteristics of anxious students in Greece in order to provide intervention to reduce FL speaking anxiety as well as suggest some strategies to the teachers to prevent the fear of negative evaluation and perception of low ability among students. According to their findings, engaging students in project work, establishing a learning community and creating a supportive classroom atmosphere, providing indirect correction, accepting the need for self-growth protection, employing teacher immediacy and praising are effective strategies to reduce students speaking anxiety in FL classrooms.

In a more recent study, Fang-Peng and Don (2010) investigated the factors regarding spoken English anxiety among Chinese college students. The obtained data put forward the following implications to reduce anxiety in oral production: cultivating the students to be accustomed to listening to English and thinking in English, asking students to imitate the recordings, promoting student's self correction as well as encouraging them to speak English to enhance their motivation.

Self-efficacy defined as beliefs about the capability to organize and execute courses of action required for accomplishing a specific task in a particular context (Tscannen-Moran et al., 1998) might also have a determining role on foreign language anxiety. For example, in their study, Güngür and Yaylı (2012) examined whether any correlation between pre-service teachers' levels of self-efficacy and FL teaching anxiety occurred. Based on their results obtained from 77 pre-service teachers around Turkey, it was found that there was a low correlation between the two variables. In other words, while the self-efficacy between the pre-service teachers was observed to be

above average, the anxiety level in English as well as the pre-service teachers' teaching speaking-listening comprehension skills was high.

In a similar study, Anyadubalu (2010) investigated the perceptions of students on self-efficacy and anxiety in acquiring English language. The correlational analysis of 318 respondents revealed a significant moderate negative relationship between English language anxiety and self-efficacy. The study concluded that these two variables were significant predictors of English language performance than the set of other confounding variables.

Based on these overviews, the purpose of the current study is to examine whether foreign language speaking anxiety scores differ with respect to the demographic factors (prior foreign language learning experience, experience abroad and having an English-speaking friend) among undergraduate students. The study also attempts to predict the roles of speaking anxiety and English self-efficacy on foreign language speaking anxiety. With these aims, the current study sets out to find answers to the following questions:

- 1. Do foreign language speaking anxiety scores differ as function of possessing the following factors:
- a. prior foreign language learning experience
- b. experience abroad (longer than a week or less than a week)
- c. an English speaking friend
- 2. What are the predictor roles of speaking anxiety and English self-efficacy on foreign language speaking anxiety?

#### Method

## **Participants**

A total of 205 (174 female; 31 male) university undergraduate students voluntarily participated in the study. The data was collected in an English-medium private university in Turkey. All participants were teacher candidates from four different undergraduate programs of the Faculty of Educational Sciences: namely, computer education and instructional technologies (14), psychological counselling and guidance (82), English language teaching (72) and preschool education (37). The ages of the participants ranged from 18 to 45 years with a mean of 21.68 (s.d. = 2.79). Additionally, 35% of the participants (72) reported that they were first exposed to English at the age seven or below. 4 % (8) of the participants reported that they were first exposed to English at the age 15 or above. In the study group, 76 % (157) of the participants completed a one-year Preparatory Programme at an English Language School before they started their undergraduate degree. They learned English as a foreign language in an intensive program which is a prerequisite for the undergraduate courses. Subsequently, they had to achieve a minimum score (80 for ELT and 60 for other undergraduate programs) over 100 from an English Proficiency Exam. In the present study, 23% (48) of the

participants did not study in the Preparatory Language School because they directly passed the proficiency exam. 95 (46 %) had spent time abroad for less than a week; whereas 110 (54 %) had spent more than a week abroad. Finally, 114 (56%) did not have any English-speaking friends, whilst 91 (44%) had one with whom they could communicate in English.

#### Data collection instruments

- 1. Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (FLCAS): The original scale has 33 items and three subscales (communication apprehension, test anxiety, and fear of negative evaluation) (Horwitz, Horwitz, & Cope, 1986). It is a self-report scale scored on a five-point Likert ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). The reliability was assessed by Cronbach alpha coefficient, was .93, and test retest over eight weeks was .83 (Horwitz, et., 1986). It is a well-constructed and widely used tool to measure foreign language anxiety (e.g. Gopang, Bughio, & Pathan, 2015; Martirossian & Hartoonian, 2015; Mahmoodzadeh, 2012). The Turkish version of the FLCAS (Şakrak, 2009) was used in the study. Three items (8, 10 and 21) were excluded from the original scale in the present study since they were not directly related to speaking anxiety. Rather, they intended to measure testing anxiety related to foreign language.
- 2. Speaking Anxiety Scale: This scale was specifically developed for the speaking anxiety of teacher candidates (Sevim, 2012). From a 39-item pool, 35 items were agreed on by the experts. After the factor analysis, 20 items were included in the scale. Four experts checked the appropriateness of the items, and inter-rater reliability was found as .86. For the construct validity, the factor structure of the scale indicating three dimensions was tested; however, total score was used in this study. It is a five point Likert type scale ranging from never (1) to always (5). The internal consistency assessed by Cronbach Alpha coefficient was found to be .91.
- 3. Self-Efficacy Scale for English: This scale was developed to measure self-efficacy beliefs related to English (Hanci-Yanar & Bümen, 2012). First, a trial form consisting of 47 items was prepared. After exploratory factor analysis (EFA), 13 items were omitted from the scale. The items in the scale were intended to measure self-efficacy beliefs in four language skills (reading, writing, speaking and listening). The confirmatory factor analysis verified the factor structure obtained from the EFA. The Cronbach alpha coefficients for each language skill (reading, writing, speaking and listening) were calculated separately. For the internal consistency of the speaking language skill (6 items) was .92. In the present study, only speaking dimension of the scale was used to measure self-efficacy related to English.

## Data collection procedure

A web-based online survey including the scales and the demographic information was prepared. The data collection procedure and the instruments were officially approved by the Ethical Committee in the university. Volunteer faculty members in the School of Educational Sciences agreed to help to collect data from their student groups. Three research assistants were employed in this process. Some of the participants were invited to the computer lab and they had a chance to access the online survey. The web-based online survey link was also shared with the students of Faculty of Educational Sciences in social media. The data were collected approximately over two months. Short introductory information about the research and informed consent were provided on the web before the implementation of the survey. Participants were reassured that the participation is voluntary and the data would be confidential. They were also informed that they were not asked to complete the measures and may stop at any time. Students who voluntarily completed the survey received grading compensation for their time and effort in their courses.

## Data analysis

Data analysis consisted of two phases. First, descriptive analyses of the main study variables and group differences based on categorization of demographics (attendance to an English preparatory school, being abroad more than week and having an English-speaking friend) were examined. One-way ANOVA was used to analyse group differences based on categorization of demographic variables. Subsequently, multiple linear regression was used to predict foreign language classroom anxiety. SPPS 19 was used to carry out statistical analyses. First, the normality check for the data distribution was taken into consideration. There was no missing value in the data set, therefore there was no need for missing value analysis. An alpha level of .05 was set for significance of hypothesis testing.

### **Findings**

#### Data screening

Before carrying out statistical analysis, three continuous variables were checked for normality requirements using various methods. The total scores of continuous variables were converted into standardized z scores and outliers greater or less than  $\pm 3$  were removed from the data and the final sample size was 203. The skewness and kurtosis values were between  $\pm 1$  (Table 1). The frequency distributions and Q-Q plots are used for visual check for normality. However, Shapiro -Wilk and Kolmogorov-Smirnov test results were significant for the total scores of English self-efficacy. The violation of the normal distribution does not cause significant statistical troubles in a large sample (> 40) sizes (Pallant, 2007). Therefore, parametric tests can be still applied even though the normality assumption is not met (Elliott & Woodward, 2007).

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**Table 1.** The descriptive values for the study variables.

## Group differences

The first research question was related to the differences of foreign language classroom anxiety for teacher candidates based on having prior foreign language learning experience in a university preparatory school, having experience abroad (longer than a week or less than a week) and having an English-speaking friend. According to the null hypothesis, there was no significant difference in foreign language classroom anxiety. Univariate analysis of variance was conducted to examine the potential differences between the groups. Statistical tests with significance level set at p = .05 were computed. The independent variables having prior foreign language learning experience in a university preparatory school, having experience abroad (longer than a week or less than a week) and having an English-speaking friend and the dependent variable was foreign language classroom anxiety. The means and standard deviations of foreign language classroom anxiety across different groups are presented in Table 2. Levene's test indicated equality of variance for the two groups across the study variables.

**Table 2.** Descriptive statistics of foreign language classroom anxiety across the demographics

	Mean	Std. Deviation	N	p
No prepatory school experience	74.29	21.47	48	.000
Prepatory school experience	85.16	19.87	157	
Total	82.61	20.72	205	
Being abroad less than a week	85.02	20.24	95	
Being abroad longer than a week	80.54	21.00	110	
Total	82.61	20.72	205	
Not having an English speaking friend	89.20	19.37	114	.000
having an English speaking friend	74.37	19.45	91	
Total	82.61	20.72	205	

The results revealed that foreign language classroom anxiety scores differed significantly as a function of having an one-year English preparatory language school

[F(1, 203) =  $5.86 \, \mathrm{p} < .000$ ] and having a English speaking friend [F(1, 203) =  $11.09 \, \mathrm{p} < .000$ ]. The results showed that the participants who have an English-speaking friend reported significantly less foreign language classroom anxiety than the participants without any English-speaking friends (see Table2). Additionally, the participants who had a one-year English preparatory language school reported significantly less foreign language classroom anxiety than the participants who did not have a one-year English preparatory language school (see Table 2). There was no mean difference in relation to foreign language classroom anxiety scores based on the participants' experience of being abroad longer than a week or not.

# The predictor roles speaking anxiety and self-efficacy for English of on Foreign Language classroom anxiety

Prior to examining the predictor relationships between the independent variables and dependent variable, the associations among the main study variables were tested. There were strong correlations in the predicted direction between foreign language classroom anxiety and speaking anxiety (r = .58 p = .000) and foreign language classroom anxiety and English self-efficacy (r = .62 p = .000). The study conducted a priori power analysis (Soper, 2014) to determine the minimum sample size required for a hierarchical multiple regression analysis. According to this analysis, an estimate of sample size was made assuming a medium effect size (Cohen's  $f^2 = .20$ ) with a power level of .85 and a significant level of .05, the minimum required sample size was estimated at 111. Hence, the sample size was satisfactory to achieve adequate power for a hierarchical multiple regression analysis. A regression model predicting the dependent variable was assessed by using stepwise method.

The regression model was significant at the .05 alpha level (see Table 3). The linear combination of the predictor variables significantly explained 54.9 % of the variance in the dependent variable, [F(1, 200) = 119.20, p < .001]. The independent variables were speaking anxiety and English self-efficacy were strong and significant predictors on foreign language classroom anxiety. The amount of explained variation can be accepted as quite high using only two factors. The remaining variation (% 45) is explained by other factors which are not used in the present study. According to the results, there was a positive association between speaking anxiety and foreign language classroom anxiety; on the other hand, there was a negative association between English self-efficacy and foreign language classroom anxiety. Table 3 indicates the results of the multiple regression analyses in detail.

Predictor Variables	В	Standart Error	β	t
Constant	40.59	4.15		9.77
Speaking Anxiety	.89	.085	.60	10.54
R=.59, R <sup>2</sup> =.35, F=111.22				
Constant	85.24	5.91		14.41
Speaking Anxiety	.72	.073	.49	-9.33
English Self Efficacy	-1.668	.17	46	
R=.74, R <sup>2</sup> =54.9, F=122.73				

**Table 3.** The results of the multiple regression analyses

#### Discussion

The purpose of this study was to examine whether demographic factors, namely, having prior foreign language learning experience in a university preparatory school, having experience abroad (longer than a week or less than a week) and having an English speaking friend) among undergraduate students have any effect on the foreign language speaking anxiety (FLSA). The study also attempted at predicting the roles of speaking anxiety and English self-efficacy on foreign language speaking anxiety.

To begin with, the findings revealed that foreign language speaking anxiety was negatively correlated with factors such as, prior foreign language experience in a university preparatory school and having a foreign friend. In other words, exposure to the foreign language either in the preparatory program or having a foreign friend helps language learners to become more proficient in the foreign language and thus, decreases the level of foreign language speaking anxiety. This result is quite consistent with the previous studies which have shown that after students become more proficient in the target language the anxiety level diminishes (Bailey, 1983; MacIntyre & Gardner, 1994b; Brown, et al., 2001).

On the contrary, although some studies (Allen & Herron, 2003; Morreale, 2011; Thomson & Lee, 2014) emphasized the fact that experience abroad may reduce anxiety, in this study, data analysis did not indicate any significant differences regarding spending a week or longer abroad and foreign language speaking anxiety. A possible reason behind this finding might be the fact that the majority of the participating students have probably been abroad for a short time and/or for touristic purposes. Another reason for this might be that they did not spend time in the country where the target language (e.g. English) is spoken which was parallel with the findings of Dogan and Tuncer's (2016) study who examined the effect of spending time abroad as one of the predictive variables for foreign language speaking anxiety.

Lastly, as for the predictor role of speaking anxiety and English self-efficacy on

foreign language speaking anxiety (FLSA), the results showed strong correlations. Specifically, in this study, it was found that there was a positive predicted direction between FLSA and speaking anxiety as well as self-efficacy and FLSA. Previous research corroborates these findings. For example, Anyadubalu's (2010) study concluded that self-efficacy directly impacts foreign language speaking anxiety which negatively affects students' performance in the target language. Similarly, Bandura (1992) suggested that students with low self-efficacy do not feel as if they can meet their goals, and therefore, feel anxious and depressed while speaking. Thus, it can be concluded that self-efficacy and speaking anxiety play strong predictive roles in foreign language speaking anxiety.

Based on the current results, the study has a number of implications for teacher education programs. To begin with, university instructors should be provided with theoretical knowledge on foreign language speaking anxiety and be asked to provide solutions about how this particular problem can be minimized in undergraduate programs. In addition, instructors should engage students in small discussion groups where they can collaborate and exchange their ideas in a positive classroom environment. This will help students to produce the language more naturally and not focus much on the mistakes. Finally, both instructors and students should collaborate and identify the major factors to be included for a non-threatening speaking context in undergraduate programs.

In the current study, there are several limitations to be taken into consideration. First, the number of the participants was limited to undergraduate students from a single faculty. To generalize the results, more participants from various faculties are needed. This lack should therefore, be addressed in future research. Besides this limitation, the present study was based only on quantitative data. As FLSA is extremely important, further research can include some qualitative data to provide more in depth information concerning this topic. In brief, FLSA needs to be investigated with great care to be able to contribute to the performance of the students at all level to a great extent.

#### Conclusion

The findings of the present study revealed that demographic variables such as having prior foreign language learning experience in a university preparatory school as well as having experience abroad (longer than a week or less than a week) are negatively correlated with foreign language speaking anxiety (FLSA). This shows that being exposed to the target language decreases FLSA among undergraduate students which shed light on the importance of these two variables during the performance in the foreign language. Besides, self-efficacy and speaking anxiety have provoking effect on FLSA. Thus, as pedagogical implications, teachers should provide the students with the opportunity to practice speaking in the classroom which will positively af-

fect their self-confidence as well as self-perception about performance in the target language. Hence, the study recommends that teachers should receive training to integrate innovative approaches in minimizing language speaking anxiety in their classrooms. In view of the above point, the study further suggests that lessons should be more learner-oriented and that cooperation among students should be sustained, which could in turn make them feel less anxious.

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