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Anxiety levels of novice and experienced EFL instructors: İstanbul Aydın University case

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Abstract

This study aims at investigating the anxiety beliefs of a group of Turkish EFL (English as a foreign language) instructors towards teaching as a profession. To collect the data, “Foreign Language Teaching Anxiety Scale” prepared by İpek (2006) was used in this study. The Cronbach’s alpha coefficient of the scale was computed as 0.98, which implies high reliability. In addition to descriptive statistics, Kruskal-Wallis test was used to find out the correlation between experience year and anxiety beliefs. According to the findings, anxiety levels of experienced instructors were lower than novice instructors and there was a highly significant relationship ($p = .002$) between years of experience and anxiety levels of instructors. In this sense, the factors affecting the anxiety of novice teachers can be studied and suggestions to lower anxiety levels might be offered.

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1. Introduction

Throughout the late 20th century, many studies have been conducted on the issue of anxiety in foreign language teaching settings. Anxiety in Foreign Language (FL) learning has attracted the attention of many researchers. In the 1970s, studies on the relationship between foreign language learning and anxiety started to be conducted (İpek, 2006) Anxiety is defined by scholars as “an unpleasant emotional state or condition which is characterized by subjective feelings of tension, apprehension, and worry and by the activation or arousal of the autonomic nervous system” (Spielberger, 1983, cited in Horwitz, Horwitz & Cope, 1986, p. 125). For many scholars anxiety can either be a state or a permanent trait of fear or apprehension (Horwitz & Young, 1991; MacIntyre, 1995; Young, 1998).

Most of the studies on the issue have dealt with learner anxiety, and relatively little research has been conducted on the anxiety experienced by FL teachers (İpek, 2006). However, research on anxiety in foreign language teaching can also be seen as crucial for many reasons. While teaching the target language, EFL teachers are known to

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experience this anxiety. It is important to find out the reasons for, or factors that may be conducive to teacher anxiety, because knowing more about the causes may help us in forming strategies to mitigate or reduce anxiety. Possible factors conducive or leading to teacher anxiety are teachers' concerns about their own reputation (Olson 1992), lower levels of experience as a teacher (Gardner and Leak, 1994), negative classroom experiences, insufficient confidence with respect to the course material (Ameen, Guffey and Jackson, 2002) and so on.

2. The aim of the study

The present study is an attempt to determine the anxiety levels of EFL instructors in terms of their gender and experience years. In this sense, the following research questions were posed and investigated in the study.

- 1- Is there any relationship between the anxiety perceptions of EFL instructors and their gender?
- 2- Is there any relationship between the years of experience and the anxiety perceptions of EFL instructors? If there is, how is the correlation between them?

3. Methodology

3.1. Instruments

In this study, the Foreign Language Teaching Anxiety Scale containing 26 items was used in order to measure the teaching anxiety of EFL instructors. It uses a 5-point likert type scale, ranging from never to always. The scale is suitable for foreign language teachers in the countries where English is spoken as a native language (İpek, 2006). The reliability for the overall scale was computed as .98 (n=35) in this study.

3.1.1. Participants and data analysis

In this study, the participants were 30 female (85.7%) and 5 male (14.3%) instructors of English who work at the School of Foreign Languages at Istanbul Aydın University. To determine if the data set is well-modeled by normal distribution, Büyüköztürk (2012) suggests Shapiro-Wilk test on the condition that the size of the study group is lower than 50. As the homogeneity assumption was violated, non-parametrical tests were employed in this study. In this sense, Mann-Whitney U and Kruskal-Wallis tests were applied with the help of SPSS 20.0 in order to analyze the data.

4. Results

In Table 1, the descriptive statistics concerning the anxiety perception of the instructors are provided. According to the table, anxiety levels of the instructors were on $X=47.91$ which is around 2.7 on 5 point likert type scale. This result accounts for moderate foreign language teaching anxiety levels of EFL instructors.

Table 1. The descriptive statistics about anxiety perceptions of EFL instructors

Scale and sub scales	N	Mean	SD	Minimum	Maximum
Foreign language teaching anxiety scale	35	47.91	22.89	27.00	121.00

Considering the first research question, Mann-Whitney U test was conducted to evaluate if there is any relationship between the gender and anxiety level of the instructors. According to the results, there is no statistically significant difference between gender and foreign language teaching anxiety ($p=.130$, $p>.05$). The male instructors had an average rank of 11.60, while the female instructors had an average rank of 19.07.

Table 2. The Kruskal-Wallis test results for the correlation between experience year and foreign language teaching anxiety of the instructors

Experience year	N	Mean Rank	p-value
0-2 years	6	31.67	.002*
2-5 years	14	17.39	
5-10 years	10	14.40	
10+ years**	5	10.50	

*p<.05 **

For the second research question about the relationship between years of experience and foreign language teaching anxiety, the results of Kruskal-Wallis test are provided in Table 2. A statistically significant relationship was found between the years of experience and foreign language teaching anxiety of the instructors ($p=.002$). To be able to understand this relationship, Spearman's rank correlation was conducted. According to the results in Table 3, there is a linear negative correlation between years of experience and foreign language teaching anxiety levels of the EFL instructors.

Table 3. The correlations between experience years and foreign language teaching anxiety levels

		Experience year
Foreign language teaching anxiety levels of the EFL instructors	r	-,585(**)

**p< 0.01, r: Spearman's rank correlation

5. Conclusion and discussion

Not finding a statistically significant relationship between gender and anxiety may be due to the gender distribution, namely the great majority of female teachers over male teachers in our sample population. There are many studies inquiring into the relationship between gender and anxiety. One study recently conducted on pre-service teachers by Yayli & Gungor (2012) has found that there is not a statistically significant relationship between the gender and anxiety levels of student teachers. Another study conducted by David P. Ngidi and Patrick T. Sibaya (2003) suggest that young male teachers show higher levels of anxiety than female teachers of all ages. However, this finding does not hold for old male teachers, which undermines to some extent the relevance of the study in question to our findings since it is not merely the gender variable that entails the statistical relationship.

While we have not been able to find any role played by gender on the anxiety levels of teachers, the findings of our study suggest that increased experience is important for lower anxiety levels. A study conducted by Fish and Fraser (2003) supports this finding in that it has found a negative correlation between anxiety and experience. Up to five years of experience, teachers report higher levels of anxiety when compared to teachers with more than five years of experience. Additionally, a study conducted by Gardner and Leak (1994) suggest that levels of anxiety are lower in experienced teachers when compared to inexperienced teachers. These findings may further emphasize the already acknowledged importance of experience for overall teaching performance if combined with the presence of research suggesting that teacher anxiety has negative effects on overall teaching effectiveness.

There are a considerable number of researches suggesting such negative effects. (Doyal and Forsyth; 1973 found a positive correlation between teacher anxiety and student anxiety; Petrusich; 1966 observed that teachers with higher levels of anxiety give less verbal support to their students, spend more time organizing classroom exercises, tend to resort more frequently to hostile remarks and actions. Besides, the students of such teachers are observed to conduct disruptive behavior more than the students of lower-anxiety teachers. Wadlington and Slaton (1998) found a negative correlation between anxiety and teaching effectiveness. The combination of such studies with the findings of the present study constitutes just another support for the widely agreed positive effects of experience. In this regard, training events could be organized to lower or raise awareness about the anxiety levels of novice teachers.

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