Dealing with Turkish EFL learners' speaking anxiety

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Abstract

The study examined the speaking anxiety of Turkish English as Foreign Language (EFL) learners to find out the reasons for their anxiety and to suggest ways to cope with it. For that purpose, qualitative data were collected from 20 Turkish students attending an English Preparatory Program at a state university in central Turkey. Data gathered through semi-structured interviews and were analyzed via inductive coding data analysis techniques and procedures. The results show that some of the potential causes of Turkish EFL learners' language anxiety are inexperience and cultural inhibitions in dealing with the teaching methods used in ELT classes, negative prior experience, differences between the first and target languages, the perfectionist nature of learners, fear of being evaluated, poor command of lexis, limited speaking opportunity, social pressure and social status. The study also offers several suggestions for teachers working with Turkish EFL learners to reduce the anxiety level of their learners.

Keywords: Speaking anxiety; Turkish EFL learners; qualitative research

1. Introduction

In the globalized world we live in, the use of English language communication has expanded and become a necessary personal characteristic (Daly, 1991). That brought about a high demand to acquire good communication skills in English. However, research shows that feelings of anxiety, apprehension, and nervousness, which are common among most EFL learners, prevent them from achieving their desired goal: speaking in English (Cheng et al., 2014; Gregersen and Horwitz, 2002; Kitano, 2001; Liu, 2007; Subasi, 2010).

The problem is so crucial for the foreign language learning process that it may affect not only the whole language performance of learners but also their ultimate achievement and perception of the language learning process (Phillips, 1992). It is believed that if the factors contributing to the speaking anxiety of Turkish learners were identified, it would

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be easier to deal with the problem. With this aim, the study intends to broaden the insight into the issue of speaking anxiety by investigating the anxiety-producing factors for Turkish EFL learners and help language teachers by recommending a variety of strategies to reduce anxiety in the classroom setting and to make the classroom environment less anxiety-provoking. This will lead to an improvement not only in their speaking skill but also in their overall performance in the target language.

1.1. Relevant Scholarship

Almost all types of learning are affected by anxiety; however, language learners suffer from significantly more anxiety in their foreign language classes (Cheng et al. 2014; Horwitz et al., 1986; MacIntyre & Gardner 1989; Muchnik & Wolfe, 1982; Tran, 2012). The fear interfering with learners' foreign language process is called foreign language anxiety. According to McIntyre and Gardner (1991), it is a complex and multidimensional phenomenon of "a subjective feeling of tension, apprehension, nervousness, and worry associated with an arousal of the automatic nervous system" (p. 298).

Some researchers like Horwitz and his friends (2001) claimed that in foreign language learning, some skills such as listening and speaking cause such feelings of tension or nervousness more. Similarly, MacIntyre and Gardner suggested that it is the speaking skill that causes the most anxiety for EFL learners (1991). Likewise, according to Arnold (2000), speaking provokes anxiety more than other language skills because speakers lack confidence in their general linguistic knowledge and it is rather different from the others because of its public nature and feeling of embarrassment in front of others due to their language imperfections.

Horwitz and his friends (1986) called the fear of speaking as Communication Apprehension (CA). The communication apprehension that most language learners experience can be caused by several different factors. According to Daly (1991), for example, one's genetic disposition can result in anxiety. Neuliep and McCroskey (1997) agreed that children are born with certain personality predispositions towards CA. Daly (1991) also stated that the act of communication is connected to earlier reinforcement and punishment. In other words, if one encounters an adverse reaction to their attempt to communicate in his/her early childhood, he/she tends to stay quiet in a similar situation in his/her later life. That can be better explained by the behaviorist learning methodology, which claims that if learners get the adverse reactions to their errors by their teachers, this can reinforce their fear and, as a result, cause them to refrain from speaking. Another factor for speaking anxiety is the lack of opportunity to develop communication skills in earlier life. That is, if one has the adequate opportunity for the acquisition of communication skills in his/her early life, he/she tends to become less apprehensive than those who receive fewer opportunities of communication (Daly, 1991).

Besides Daly, Buss is another researcher studying CA. According to Buss (1980) some elements in the situation such as novelty, formality, subordinate status, conspicuousness, unfamiliarity, dissimilarity, and degree of attention can result in increased CA. The researcher explained that in a novel situation, people are more likely to grow CA sharply because such a situation presents them with increased uncertainty about how they should behave. Talking in front of others may not be something that people do every day, so it can be a novel situation for most people, which cause them to feel apprehensive. Buss explained that interacting with person in a higher position may have a similar effect on people. In such situations, people try to show the appropriate behavior, which is defined by the person holding a higher status, especially in evaluative settings. CA can also grow because of being conspicuous in one's environment. Speaking in public or standing up to make a comment in a meeting or classroom can make most people conspicuous. According to Buss (1980), the more conspicuous people feel, the more CA they are likely to experience.

Other researchers studying the issue pointed out the fact that both academic and social contexts may contribute to anxiety among language learners. Scovel (1991), for example, identified anxiety as a psychological construct, and made a list of possible psychological factors that can lead to language anxiety comprising the learner's own self, self-perceptions, perceptions of others (peers, teachers, interlocutors, etc.) and target language communication situations, beliefs about foreign language learning and feeling oneself insufficient in the target language. Scovel (1991) also mentioned the social side of the anxiety and pointed out the fact that the environments that the native and the target languages take place are very distinct from each other. According to him, due to the dramatic social and cultural differences, language learners may experience considerable anxiety. The same anxiety-provoking factor was mentioned by Young (1991). He claimed that target language is a representation of another cultural community, so one's concerns about ethnicity, foreignness, and the like can cause language learners to feel anxiety. Young added that the social status of the speaker and the interlocutor, a sense of power relations between them, and gender could be other important factors causing anxiety for language learners. In sum, there are a variety of elements in speaking situations that can cause distress to increase in the EFL context. Most of these elements are not under the person's control and produced by others or other factors in the communication environment. If it can be easy to be controlled, most language learners will be less likely to suffer from anxiety intervening with their oral performance in EFL classes.

There are several studies on language anxiety, but very few of them are specific to the Turkish context. Dalkılıç is one of the researchers studying the issue in the national context. Dalkılıç (2001) studied the relationship between EFL learners' foreign language anxiety levels and their achievement in speaking courses. She collected both qualitative and quantitative data from 126 Turkish freshman EFL learners. The findings of the study revealed a significant correlation between the two variables. Besides, Ay (2010)

examined the foreign language anxiety of young adolescent students in relation to language skills at different levels. She collected data from 160 Turkish EFL learners using a revised form of a foreign language anxiety scale. The results of her study revealed that the foreign language anxiety of the young language learners varies depending on the level of learners and the language skills. Beginner level learners tend to have anxiety in receptive skills while in higher levels students have more anxiety in productive skills. In another study, Ozturk and Gurbuz (2014) investigated the level of Turkish EFL learners' speaking anxiety as well as the major causes, of the issue from the perspectives of Turkish EFL learners. Quantitative and qualitative data revealed interesting and sometimes controversial results. For example, the quantitative data indicated that Turkish learners experience a low level of EFL speaking anxiety; however, the quantitative data showed that most of the participants perceive speaking to be rather as anxiety-provoking. As regards the major causes of EFL learners' speaking anxiety, the study mentioned pronunciation, immediate questions, fears of making mistakes, and negative evaluation.

1.2. Research Questions

As stated above, the national studies focus on the general language anxiety of EFL learners. There are very few studies in the literature investigating the speaking anxiety, particularly in the Turkish context. In addition, almost all of these studies investigated the intensity of Turkish EFL learners' language anxiety and its relation to language proficiency and achievement. Different from previous research, the current study intends to examine the factors intervening in the speaking performance of Turkish EFL learners in order to find better solutions to the problem. Accordingly, the study aims to present a broad understanding of the speaking anxiety of Turkish EFL learners by utilizing qualitative methods to shed light on the main causes of the problem. This study intends to answer the following research questions:

1. What are the sources of Turkish EFL learners' speaking anxiety?
2. How can EFL teachers deal with the problem?

2. Method

In this study, to explore the speaking anxiety of Turkish EFL learners, qualitative method was used as it is a subjective experience changing from one person to another. Different from most of the previous research which investigated the relationship between anxiety and overall language acquisition, performance, and proficiency or the level of language learners' speaking anxiety, the study has a different aim. That is, to gain deeper insight into the causes of the issue so as to deal with it more effectively.

2.1. Research Site and Subjects

Research has been conducted in an English Preparatory Program at a state university in Turkey. The subjects were chosen from different levels. Twenty Turkish nationality subjects participated in the study. Ten of the participants were from lower-level groups like beginner and elementary groups, and the remaining ten were from the higher levels like intermediate and upper-intermediate groups. An equal number of male and female students participated in the study.

To choose the interviewees, the researcher initially informed all the instructors working at the institution about the purpose of the study via e-mail. Then, they were asked to respond to the e-mail if they permit the researcher to observe one of their speaking lessons to determine the students suffering from speaking anxiety the most. The researcher observed the speaking lessons of fifteen instructors accepting to participate in the study. During the observations, the researcher determined the students that seem to suffer from speaking anxiety the most using an observation form. On the form, there was a list of indicators of speaking anxiety such as being reluctant to speak, initiate a conversation, ask or answer questions to their peers or teachers, ask for clarification etc. Observing students who could not perform these activities or who showed feelings of anxiety, apprehension, and nervousness while doing all these were noted by the researcher. At the end of a week-long observation period, the researcher determined 32 students who seemed to suffer from speaking anxiety the most. After talking to their instructors and validating the final list of students suffering from speaking anxiety the most, the researcher sent e-mails to these students explaining the purpose of the study and the confidentiality issue. The researcher asked them to respond to the e-mail if they agreed to take part in the interview process. Out of the 32 students, 20 responded to the e-mail agreeing to participate in the study.

2.2. Data collection instruments

To collect data about the factors that cause speaking anxiety for Turkish EFL learners, the researcher administered semi-structured interviews with the participants. In the initial interview process, the participants were first asked descriptive questions to establish a rapport with them, and then a semi-structured question format was used to encourage them to express how they feel about speaking in English and the kind of situations and activities that cause stress or anxiety for them in language classes. In the last part of the interview schedule, they were asked to evaluate the share of themselves as learners, their teachers, the curriculum and the language teaching policy in the country in creating anxiety in speaking English. The interview was reviewed by a faculty member from the English Language Teaching department who was also an expert in qualitative research. The purpose was to determine if the interview questions could serve

for the first research question. Based on the feedback received from the expert, the researcher made minor changes on the wording of initial interview protocol.

2.3. Data collection procedure

Participants were contacted via e-mail, and during the initial contact, it was explained to them that participating in the study is voluntary and that all interviews would be conducted in Turkish, would be tape-recorded, and be transcribed for research purposes. They were ensured that all the information that would be gained through them would be kept strictly confidential and would have no effect on their instructors' judgements of them. All the participants were given their consent to participate in the study. The interviews were done between 15 March and 5 April 2017 in the researcher's office, and each took about an hour. The ethical approval for the research was obtained from METU Scientific Research and Publication Ethics Committee in February 2017.

2.4 Data analysis

The interview data were analyzed and interpreted via inductive coding data analysis techniques and procedures. The audio-recorded interviews were listened to and transcribed. Later, the raw data that emerged from subjects' experience about speaking anxiety was reduced into codes with a focus based on the research questions so that initial codes would be generated, and a list of them might grow after going over all of the transcripts. Immersing in the data and reviewing the codes, the researcher decided on more general labels and sub-labels. In this way, the themes, which shaped the results of the study were named and described. These emerging categories were used to explain the phenomenon under investigation.

2.5 Trustworthiness

The researcher followed Lincoln and Guba's (1985) principles to prove trustworthiness. To ascertain credibility, the researcher collected data on sources of speaking anxiety from different classes on different levels at the institution including both lower and higher levels classes. While determining the potential interviewees, the researcher talked to the classroom instructors to validate that the students determined at the end of the observation procedure really had speaking anxiety. Furthermore, the researcher used member checking to ensure the study's credibility (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). As an example, the transcriptions of the interviews were sent to the participants and they were asked to review it to exclude the risk of misinterpretations and mistakes. Twelve of the 20 participants responded to this request, and none of them required a change.

3. Results

Qualitative data collected through interviews revealed beneficial information regarding the causes of Turkish EFL learner's speaking anxiety. Nine factors contributing to the speaking anxiety of Turkish learners are identified: inexperience and cultural inhibitions in dealing with the teaching methods used in ELT classes, negative prior experience, linguistic differences, and perfectionist nature of learners, fear of being evaluated, poor command of lexis, limited speaking opportunity, social pressure, and social status.

3.1. Inexperience and cultural inhibitions in dealing with the teaching methods used in ELT classes

The Turkish EFL learners participating in the study expressed that they are not used to the social interaction that is required for EFL style classroom practices. They explained that a great emphasis in EFL classes is put on them as learners, their interaction with the teacher and their peers, and their ability to come up with original opinions. However, all of the participants claimed that in the Turkish school system, they were taught to be quiet, obedient, and passive to be good learners. They also viewed the idea that the method of traditional teaching in Turkey is teacher-centered, and unlike ELT classrooms, little or no input is expected from the student. As a result, they have difficulties in speaking in English, as stated by student 6:

> *"English class is so different from the other classes. I mean never in my life I have been expected to speak that much and take part in lesson that much. At elementary, secondary, and high school, we were asked to be quiet and listen to the teacher without saying anything except for answering the teacher's questions. That is a huge difference. I mean in our English class, our teacher wants us to speak all the time, not only to answer her questions. She wants us to share a lot about personal life with her and with our friends. I could not get used to that."*

3.2. Negative prior experience

Some of the anxiety occurring in Turkish EFL learners can be attributed to the previous negative experiences in language learning. Most participants participating in the study expressed that they have been learning English since they were in second grade, and they have not received much positive feedback for their performance. Some of them even stated that their EFL teachers tended to punish them for each grammatical or pronunciation mistakes they made. They added that they had not been rewarded for trying to speak in English, but praised just for the correct use of the language. Some of them claimed that probably because of that, each time they start talking in English, they only focus on producing grammatically correct sentences. Also, they expressed whenever

they realize a mistake in their own speech; they feel unsuccessful and would like to quit speaking. Student 18 stated that:

> *"My English teacher at high school used to penalize us because of the grammar and pronunciation mistakes we make while speaking. If we had a pronunciation mistake, she made us repeat the same word or sentence several times in front of our friends until she was satisfied with our pronunciation. For our grammar mistakes, she used to make us write the correct form of the sentence ten times in our notebook. Maybe because of that, I feel so stressful when I am expected to speak in English."*

Interestingly, some of the participants mentioned how their previous EFL teachers described the language learning process as a special ability not possessed by all. Therefore, they tend to believe not having the ability to learn a foreign language. One of the participants, student 5, stated that:

> *"I do not think I have the ability to learn a language. I believe I have the ability to learn Mathematics and Geometry, but I do not think I am skillful at learning English. If I had the skill, I would have learned it much before, at middle or high school, right? Knowing that makes me even more stressed when speaking in English."*

3.3. Difference between L1 and L2

The difference between their mother tongue, Turkish, and the target language, English, appears to be perceived to be a cause of their speaking anxiety by most of the participants. The majority of the interviewees complained that English is an entirely different language from their first language, so they find learning the language quite challenging, mainly speaking in that language. One of the participants, student 3, said that:

> *"Pronunciation is too hard for me to learn…the words in Turkish are pronounced as they are written. However, in English, we do not pronounce the words the way they are written. We are not used to that at all. The English language system is so complex and full of irregularities and exceptions. As I know how difficult all these things are, I get anxious while learning and speaking in English."*

In a similar way, student 10 said:

> *"Everything is very different in these two languages: pronunciation, spelling, grammar. For example, countable and uncountable nouns are different. I do not understand why a noun is countable in one language, and it is uncountable in another. Thinking that there so many differences like that frustrates me…. The differences make it so difficult to learn English and even more difficult to speak English. Therefore, I feel so nervous while speaking in English."*

3.4. Perfectionist nature of learners

One of the main factors involved in Turkish EFL learners' speaking anxiety seems to be their perfectionist nature and their self-criticism. The participants are adult language learners studying at a prominent national university. All of the participants said that they had a successful school life, and they have had several achievements in their lives. Their responses suggested that they expect the same success at learning English. Although it was their first term in the English language program, they all seemed to have high expectations for themselves. Some of them also expressed how disappointed and desperate they felt when they made a mistake. Most of the participants showed a perfectionist nature as their responses suggested that they were very critical and harsh towards themselves in their language learning endeavor. The responses of student 8, for example, indicated that his perfectionist nature leads him to criticize himself harshly, and as a result, prevents him from trying to speak in English class.

Student 8:

> *"I have pressure in my mind that I should not make any mistakes in English, in writing, reading, or speaking. I know I can do that. I was among the 100 most successful students at the university entrance exam. I did not have even one mistake in the math section. So I can do the same thing in English. I must do that. I cannot fail to learn English. No, I cannot…"*

3.5. Fear of being evaluated

Another cause of speaking anxiety of Turkish EFL learners is their concern about the evaluation of them by others. Some of the participants voiced their fear of making mistakes as the most significant cause of their anxiety in the language classroom. Student 5, for example, stated that:

> *"Whenever I speak, I know that our teacher checks if I can use the structures we have learned correctly or if I pronounce the words correctly. I know that she evaluates me, my performance. Thinking this all the time makes me nervous."*

Some others mentioned the countless exams they have had in their life, and how stressful they feel thinking of they need to perform well as someone is evaluating their performance. One of the participants claimed that "being evaluated always means either win or lose nothing in between." Thus, the participants seemed to feel fear and uneasy when they think they are evaluated.

3.6. Poor command of lexis

In the interviews, most of the participants mentioned that they do not know enough vocabulary items to express themselves in English. Although they have sufficient ideas

to express, they have to look for suitable lexis, and this makes even a simple task very demanding for them since remembering vocabulary items while communicating in the target is not an easy thing to achieve. Some of them expressed that although they know the vocabulary they need for a specific context, they cannot retrieve it quickly. That seems to cause a sense of failure among learners and trigger anxiety while speaking. Student 1 expressed his concern:

> *"I am not confident because I do not have enough words to express myself in English, especially when speaking. Although we learn tens of new words each day, I cannot remember most of them while speaking. While writing, it is better, as I have some time to think about, but while speaking, I have no time; I need to find the word in seconds. When I cannot, I feel terrible. That's a terrible feeling. It frustrates me a lot. I feel anxious whenever I am in this situation."*

3.7. Limited speaking opportunity

Almost all of the participants expressed that they can practice speaking only in the class environment. They criticized that they have to improve their language skills within a limited time in a limited environment. They blamed the previous language instruction they received at middle and high schools for neglecting speaking skill. Some of them also criticized their current situation by stating that they need to improve their speaking only through interacting with their teachers and their peers. It is clear that Turkish EFL learners participating in the study do not have a chance to learn or practice the language outside class, in a less formal environment. Some of the participants expressed that because of the limited exposure to the target language and lack of opportunities to practice speaking, they could not develop their skills, and as a result, they feel embarrassed or stressed when they are required to speak in class. Regarding this, student 3 expressed that:

> *"We didn't speak in English in language classes at high school. We were taught grammar most of the time and did grammar practice most of the time. They did not give us enough chance to speak or practice English. Now our teachers expect us to speak fluently. That's not fair. How can we speak in English now? Here at university, I can only hear and speak English in class. With whom, where can I practice my speaking? Nowhere. Isn't it normal that I cannot feel comfortable in speaking English? "*

Student 12 also mentioned the limited opportunity for speaking by saying:

> *"We have no chance to communicate in English outside the class. I study to improve my reading, vocabulary, and grammar at home or the library, but how I can develop my speaking skill is something I don't know."*

3.8. Social pressure

Another factor for language anxiety of Turkish learners is social pressure (perceptions of others). Language anxiety may also be an outcome of the social and communicative side of language learning. Two of the participants claimed that the humiliating attitude of their peers towards their errors creates stressful environments in class, and this is significantly related to their feeling anxious in class. Regarding the issue, student 4 expressed:

> *"I feel nervous when I speak because I may make a mistake, and everyone in the class will laugh at me and think I'm so stupid. Also, when I mispronounce a word, which I frequently do, some of the students in class try to hide that they find me very funny and stupid. I know that. I feel that."*

3.9. Social status

Another factor of anxiety is the interaction itself. The interview results suggest that sense of power relation between students and teachers can also be a source of anxiety for Turkish EFL students. One of the participants remarked that she feels stressed while speaking to her teacher but not to her friends. That indicates that she sees her teacher as an authority figure. As a result of her lack of confidence in her linguistic competence, she feels inferior and apprehensive to communicate with her teacher, whom she seems as someone having higher status. Student 14 said:

> *"When I need to talk to a friend, it is easy for me. I am quite fluent, but when the teacher asks me to speak, then it is difficult. I have to find just the right idea and the right vocabulary. She is the teacher; of course, I have to watch out what I say and how I say. Therefore, I try to think carefully. While I'm planning all these things, the teacher looks at me patiently, but I feel stupid because I know it should not take that long. Then, I began to get stressed and quit speaking."*

4. Discussion

Insights and experiences of Turkish EFL learners participating in the study helped the researcher in determining the factors contributing to their speaking anxiety. Initially, qualitative data indicate that Turkish EFL learners tend to feel anxious in EFL classes because they are not familiar with the social components of EFL style teaching practices, where a great emphasis is put on individualism, interacting with the teacher, and coming up with original ideas. Contrarily, they are taught that quietness, obedience, and passivity are the qualities that a good learner should have. Traditionally, the method of teaching in Turkey is teacher-centered, and it is very unlikely to expect input and participation from learners, unlike ELT classrooms. Therefore, as Turkish EFL students are unfamiliar with this type of lesson, it is likely that they cannot change their habit

instantly. That is why they have extreme stress in speaking in EFL lessons. This finding of the study is in line with what literature suggests about speaking anxiety in EFL classes. According to Buss (1980), some elements such as novelty and unfamiliarity in the situation can result in increased communication apprehension. In the case of Turkish EFL learners, not being familiar with the cultural inhibitions in dealing with the teaching methods used in ELT classes creates a high level of anxiety when they are required to communicate orally.

To help Turkish EFL learners deal with that problem, EFL teachers need to provide initial training on the specific characteristics of the discipline, that is, learning English as a foreign language. In other words, teachers need to explain how learning a foreign language is different from learning other disciplines such as math, science, and geography. EFL learners should be informed that while some other disciplines are mostly based on content learning, language requires skills and content learning. Therefore, English courses aim for skill development besides content knowledge, so by nature, they are different from most other content courses. In the preliminary training that will be given to Turkish EFL learners, different roles expected from them as learners should also be explained. It should be clarified that listening to the instructor and answering his/her questions will not be enough in EFL classes; instead, they will be expected to be more active and autonomous in the lesson and be more responsible for their own learning. In addition, learners should also be acknowledged that language learning is not a special ability owned by some, but can be achieved by anyone putting the necessary effort and time. Another recommendation for EFL teachers teaching Turkish learners is that they should not show a reaction when their learners are not willing to speak. This will not solve the problem, but make it even worse by increasing the learners' anxiety. In Turkey, traditionally learners may be quieter than some other cultures by nature. EFL teachers are advised to show understanding towards that and avoid putting pressure on their students to be more outspoken in EFL classes. Being more tolerant towards them may encourage learners to speak more. They should keep in mind that learners may be reluctant to speak at first, but in time it will change as there will be progress in terms of their confidence, competence and as a result in their speaking performance.

Secondly, some of the anxiety occurring in Turkish EFL learners can be attributed to the negative prior experiences in language learning. Their former EFL teachers' tendency to reward only the correct use of the language, and to punish them for each grammatical or pronunciation mistakes seems to lead Turkish EFL learners to feel unsuccessful whenever they have a mistake, which lead them to refrain from speaking. Turkish EFL learners also tend to have a self-defeating belief that they will be unsuccessful again in their each effort to speak in English. This finding matches with the previous research. To illustrate, Daly (1991) suggested that the act of communication is connected to earlier reinforcement and punishment. In other words, if one encounters an adverse reaction to their attempt to communicate, he/she tends to stay quiet in a similar situation in his/her

later life. That explains why Turkish learners who were penalized for their mistakes in speaking are reluctant and even nervous when they are expected to speak in English in their current classes. To resolve the problem, Turkish EFL learners should gain a positive experience of speaking English in their current classes. Feedback is critical in this regard. Teachers can change something which might sound negative into a highly positive situation with constructive feedback as opposed to a destructive one. In this way, they can improve students' perception of errors. Instead of interrupting and highlighting mistakes when their learners are communicating or making negative comments on students' errors by displaying a judgmental attitude, teachers can develop a positive way of providing corrective and constructive feedback on errors by making private notes of the errors and later addressing the whole class without saying that this is the error a particular student made. As a result, students can be given a chance to gain a positive experience in English.

Thirdly, differences between the first language and the target language seem to cause difficulty for Turkish EFL learners. Lexical, grammatical and pronunciation differences between both languages make the foreign language learning process rather challenging and put extra stress on Turkish EFL learners. The results of Buss's study support this finding of the research. In Buss' study, dissimilarity of the target language is mentioned as a possible cause of speaking anxiety. Likewise, the current research suggests that because of the divergence between their mother tongue and the target language, Turkish EFL learners suffer from speaking anxiety. To deal with the problem, teachers of Turkish EFL learners can raise the awareness of their learners about the culturally specific rules. Immersing them into the second language culture can be another useful way for that. They can pose students to the target language culture by having them watch movies, listen to music, and read books in the target language.

Fourthly, another factor involved in Turkish EFL learners speaking anxiety is their perfectionist nature and their self-criticism. The participants of the study have quite high expectations regarding their English performance, probably because they are adult language learners studying at a notable university. Because of their age and academic background, they seem to have a perfectionist nature. These perfectionist learners tend to adopt some irrational beliefs and unrealistic performance standards for themselves. They are not satisfied with an acceptable performance, but long for an exceptional one. Thus, they evaluate themselves rather harshly even if their teacher is satisfied with their performance. As a result, they suffer from extreme anxiety while speaking in English. Several scholars in literature highlight the same factor. Frost, Marten, Lahart and Rosenblate (1990), as well as Gregersen and Horwitz (2002) all, share the idea that perfectionists set excessively high standards for performance, and they evaluate themselves too harshly. It can be recommended to the teachers of Turkish EFL learners to overcome their students' perfectionist nature by encouraging them to make reasonable commitments for successful language learning and set achievable and realistic goals for

themselves. More importantly, students should be guided as to how to direct their attention away from self-centered worries when they are speaking in English. Teachers should also explain that they should not seek accuracy before saying anything in English or should not attach great importance to speaking with a native-like accent. Also, allowing for planning, thinking, and rehearsal time is crucial in foreign language speaking context to minimize mistakes and maximize the chance of a good speaking performance.

Another cause of speaking anxiety of Turkish EFL learners is their concern about making mistakes and being evaluated by others. The Turkish school system places a great emphasis on evaluation, and Turkish students' lives typically revolve around many examinations that determine their future. That puts significant pressure on learners' life. Data also revealed that the problem of speaking anxiety of Turkish EFL learners lies in their fear of making mistakes. This factor is reported in previous literature as well. MacIntyre and Gardner (1993) stated that learners who experience a deep fear towards being evaluated negatively are more likely to refrain from speaking either by not interacting at all or having a very short interaction. As Turkish EFL learners appear to filled with fear of making mistakes, their teachers can try to encourage them to have the confidence to make mistakes in order to acquire communication skills. To decrease their risk of making mistakes, EFL teachers need to provide opportunities before an oral performance, at the end of the task cycle, for task repetition to help develop greater accuracy and fluency. They can also be informed that the clarity of the message is of greater importance than the errors made. Another way for teachers to overcome their learners' fear of making mistakes is to move away from evaluating students not only negatively but also positively because each time they give feedback either negative or positive to the language they produce rather than the content of their speech; students think that their teacher is not interested in what they say but only cares for how they say it. If teachers can manage to show a genuine interest in their students as people, not merely evaluate the language they produce in English, their learners will feel good about themselves without feeling as if they were being evaluated each time they utter a sentence.

Poor command of lexis is another factor for Turkish EFL learners' anxiety. To perform well in speaking tasks, students should have sufficient lexis to express themselves or fulfill the tasks. In other words, even if they have sufficient ideas to express, speakers have to look for suitable lexis that may make a simple task very demanding for them since remembering and retrieving vocabulary items while communicating in the target language is not an easy thing to achieve especially for beginners. Not being able to retrieve the vocabulary item that they know may create a sense of failure that will trigger their anxiety while speaking. Previous research supports the idea that poor command of lexis leads to speaking anxiety in EFL classes. Ellis (1994) mentioned that the learner with inadequate linguistic knowledge (grammar, pronunciation, and lexis)

has the tendency to have high anxiety levels. Kayaoglu and Saglamel (2013) also suggested that linguistic complications in vocabulary increased the anxiety of Turkish EFL learners. To find a way around the problem, teachers of Turkish EFL learners should make sure that their students have sufficient lexis to complete a task successfully. Planning the speaking tasks in the production stage of the lesson after making sure that all students are equipped with enough lexis to fulfill the task is a way of doing that. Speakers tend to use repetitive and restrictive structures. Practicing and using these language items in their speech will also help second language learners not only to improve their fluency but also to speak more accurately.

Limited speaking opportunity is another serious factor contributing to their speaking anxiety. Turkish EFL learners can practice speaking only in a class environment. That can be justified by emphasizing the fact that the English language in Turkey is a foreign language, and it has almost no communicative use in students' daily life. Therefore, there is not sufficient opportunity to communicate in English outside the classroom. The limited exposure to English language and lack of opportunities to practice speaking may not let Turkish EFL learners develop their communicative abilities, and this seems to result in stress when they are required to speak. Similarly, Gan (2012) mentioned insufficient opportunities for students' language practice as a potential cause of students' weakness in speaking. To create more opportunities for speaking at least in class, speaking should be a component of all language proficiency and achievement exams at both local and national levels. Speaking has always been believed to be the most neglected skill in Turkey, and this neglect may have stemmed from the fact that speaking does not form part of language exams and that, traditionally, English teaching programs tend to emphasize written production over oral production. If English exams contain a speaking component, there will be a stronger speaking element incorporated into the language curriculum. As a result, there will even be separate classes for conversations, discussions, and pronunciation practices. This way, there will be more opportunities to practice communication and interaction skills in class.

Yet another factor for speaking anxiety of Turkish EFL learners is social pressure; in other words, perceptions of others. Language anxiety is also an outcome of the social and communicative aspects of language learning. The humiliating attitude of peers as a reaction to the learners' errors seems to create a stressful environment in the class, and this significantly leads Turkish EFL learners to experience speaking anxiety. This finding of the study is in line with Gregersen and Horwitz's (2002) study. In their research, the scholars claimed that fear of making mistakes is connected to the learners' concern that they will lose their positive image or impression in the mind of their teacher and peers. To deal with the situation, language instructors should provide a friendly and non-threatening learning environment that supports students' learning. They can arrange various in-class activities to help students to become better acquainted with the speaking component of the lesson during the first few lessons and encourage them to

have a supportive relationship with one another in class. Having a good relationship with other students and also the teacher will facilitate the students' participation in speaking tasks and decrease their anxiety level. In addition, teachers of such learners should also give more opportunities for them to practice speaking in small groups that will cause less social stress.

The last factor of anxiety is the interaction itself. The teaching-learning process requires some set roles and discourse patterns that may trigger speaking anxiety. Data revealed that unequal status between students and teachers could also be a source of anxiety for the students. The difference between the status between students and teachers was mentioned as a source of anxiety for students in the study of Pica (1987). To deal with the issue, language instructors should display friendly, helpful, and cooperative behavior so that students can feel comfortable when speaking not only to their peers but also to their teachers. An EFL teacher having these characteristics and creating such a classroom environment will help build students' confidence and self-esteem in their foreign language ability. That can reduce students' fear of looking or sounding inept when they make a mistake talking to their teacher, and as a result, reduce the effect of social and status difference between students and teachers to a considerable extent.

5. Conclusions

This study dealt with the sources of Turkish EFL learners' anxiety in communicating in English through the perspectives of learners at an English preparatory program at a state national university. Data regarding the sources of speaking anxiety were collected from 20 Turkish EFL learners through interviews. The results showed that some of the potential causes of Turkish EFL learners' language anxiety are inexperience and cultural inhibitions in dealing with the teaching methods used in ELT classes, negative prior experience, linguistic differences between the first and the target language, perfectionist nature of learners and fear of being evaluated. Moreover, perceptions of others and unequal status between students and teachers are perceived by the students to be important sources of speaking anxiety. To help Turkish EFL learners deal with their speaking anxiety, the study put forward some practical suggestions to the EFL teachers teaching in the Turkish context as well.

Basically, speaking anxiety remains to be one of the most significant issues in EFL instruction in Turkey. The finding of the study expects to shed light on the complex phenomenon by contributing to the understanding of speaking anxiety and providing useful insights informing language teachers teaching Turkish students properly to enable them to handle the problem effectively. However, the empirical results reported herein should be considered in light of some limitations. The findings suggested by the study are based on the data collected from only university students learning English at a

preparatory program through the interview method. For future studies, it was suggested that data from EFL instructors be collected as well. In addition, different data collection instruments like reflective journals, observations, or teacher reflections can be employed to deepen the knowledge of speaking anxiety of Turkish EFL students.

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