How Anxious are Turkish EFL Learners? Tolerance of Ambiguity and Self-perceived Communication Competence as Predictors

Mehmet Asmalı

Alanya Alaaddin Keykubat University, Turkey / Contact: asmalimehmet@gmail.com iD

Abstract

Foreign language anxiety has already been reported to deteriorate learners' language learning performance. It is closely related to how learners perceive their communication performance in the target language and how tolerant they are when they face ambiguities in foreign language learning. Therefore, the current study investigated learners' foreign language classroom anxiety (FLCA), second language tolerance of ambiguity (SLTA), and self-perceived communication competence (SPCC). The study also aimed to examine the potential predictive power of SPCC and SLTA on Turkish EFL learners' FLCA. Mixed-methodology design was used combining the data gathered from four semi-structured interviews and three different questionnaires. 156 freshmen studying at a Turkish state university enrolled in different departments participated in this study. Descriptive statistics showed that students had a moderate level of FLCA, but low SLTA and SPCC. Multiple regression analyses significantly identified SLTA and SPCC as predicting FLCA. Both independent variables were negatively related to FLCA explaining 26% of the total variance. In the light of the findings, some practical suggestions were put forward both for language teachers and further research.

APA Citation

Asmalı, M. (2019). How anxious are Turkish EFL learners? Tolerance of ambiguity and self-perceived communication competence as predictors *The Literacy Trek, 5*(1), 25-46.

Introduction

The recent move from teacher-centeredness to student-centeredness in language teaching and learning has given individual differences and academic emotions

prominence in literature (Pekrun, Goetz, Titz & Perry, 2002). These individual differences involve different affective variables considered to be essential in foreign language learning process, such as self-esteem, anxiety, extroversion, empathy, and several others. Of all these, anxiety is quite possibly the emotional factor that most profoundly inhibits students' learning. For this reason, it has taken the attention of several researchers in the field of language learning (Arnold & Brown, 1999).

As proposed in its definition, students feel extra tense, nervous, apprehensive, and worried (Horwitz, Horwitz, & Cope, 1986) especially when faced with evaluation, which is common in students' life. In academic context, specifically in language learning and teaching field, anxiety has been termed differently depending on the focus of the studies, such as 'foreign language anxiety' (MacIntyre & Gardner, 1991), 'language anxiety' (Horwitz et al.,1986), 'test anxiety' (Horwitz & Young, 1991), and 'foreign language classroom anxiety' (hereafter FLCA) (Horwitz et al., 1986). Despite slight differences, all anxiety types are believed to have adverse effects on the success of learning a foreign language (Ellis, 1996; Horwitz et al., 1986; MacIntyre & Gardner, 1991; Young, 1991). It has been found to be negatively associated with language learning achievement and being successful in language classes (Amiri & Ghonsooly, 2015; Arnold & Brown, 1999; Awan, Azher, Anwar & Naz, 2010; Dörnyei, 2005). It is obvious that learners of foreign languages mostly have high levels of FLCA which decreases their concentration on learning and ends in with the failure on tasks, resistance to learning, or unwillingness to attend activities and classes (Horwitz et al., 1986; MacIntyre, Noels & Clement, 1997; Samimy & Rardin, 1994).

This important construct in language learning started receiving attention from researchers of foreign languages in the 1980s (Bailey, 1983; Horwitz et al., 1986; Lucas, 1984; Young, 1986). FLCA studies have been mostly concerned with its relationship with students' achievements (Awan et al., 2010; Dalkılıç, 2001), gender (Al-Saraj, 2014; Mesri, 2012), student participation (Zhanibek, 2001), and personality traits (Dewale, Petrides, & Furnham, 2008; MacIntyre & Charos, 1996). Although literature includes studies explaining relationships of FLCA with some constructs, it is limited in terms of the factors affecting it. One of those rare factors is Second Language Tolerance of Ambiguity (hereafter SLTA) (Dewaele & Ip, 2013), which is defined as "a person's ability to function rationally and calmly in a situation in which interpretation

of all stimuli is not clear" (Chapelle & Roberts, 1986, p. 30). Foreign language learners, especially with lower proficiency ones, often face ambiguity about the exact pronunciation of the words, grammatical rules, sentence structures, and many other aspects of language, which may be anxiety-provoking. Learners with limited foreign language knowledge fight with abundance of rules during language learning and they come across lots of ambiguities. It is a common reaction of human beings to react with anxiety to these ambiguities. Therefore, it could be claimed that, in the academic context, learners who are more comfortable with ambiguity are expected to have better results in foreign language learning and to have lower FLCA.

In contrast with the relationship between FLCA and SLTA, another construct which is hypothesized to play role in determining students' FLCA is perceived communication competence (hereafter PCC) of the learners in that specific foreign language. This construct refers to learners' self-evaluation of his/her communication ability. Learners' real level of communication competence and how they perceive it may be very different. In the case of a low PCC, learners are mostly expected to avoid communication (MacIntyre et al., 1999) and possess high level of FLCA due to low self-esteem and insecure feeling in the classroom Hembree, 1988; Price, 1991).

Despite close relationships, these three constructs were partly investigated in the current literature (Dewaele & Ip, 2013). Therefore, this study aims to find out the potential effects of SLTA and PCC on FLCA to fill in the gap in the literature in the context of Turkey. Answers to the following research questions were attempted to be provided:

1. What are the Turkish students' perceptions of their 'perceived communication competence', 'foreign language classroom anxiety', and 'second language tolerance of ambiguity' in English?

2. Do 'perceived communication competence' and 'second language tolerance of ambiguity' predict the Turkish EFL students' 'foreign language classroom anxiety'?

Foreign language classroom anxiety

Both cognitive and affective factors play roles in the complex process of learning a foreign language. While the former accepts learning as mental and internal representations (Chastain, 1988), the latter is more concerned with the emotional side of language learning (Brown, 1994). For Chastain (1988), the affective side is more effective and it has a greater role due to its controlling influence on cognitive factors. One of the significant affective factors is anxiety in language teaching and learning (Dörnyei, 2005). It is accepted as uncomfortable emotional state during which people feel danger, powerless, and they experience tension (Blau, 1955). Anxiety has been identified by three different characterizations: trait anxiety, state anxiety, and situation-specific anxiety (MacIntyre & Gardner, 1991). While trait anxiety is known as a propensity to feel anxious in different situations and time; state anxiety is more concerned with temporary feeling of nervousness or worry in some certain events and actions (Brown, 2007). Especially, in language learning context, specific conditions, such as speaking in front of people or some examinations may trigger situation-specific anxiety type.

Apart from classic view of anxiety, FLCA is considered to be situation-specific anxiety. Horwitz et al. (1986, p. 128) defined it as "a distinct complex of self-perceptions, beliefs, feelings, and behaviors related to language learning arising from the uniqueness of the (foreign) language learning process". This concept has been investigated from different perspectives. Considering gender differences, females were mostly reported to be less anxious than males (Amiri & Ghonsooly, 2015; Awan et al., 2010; Elaldı, 2016). Students' general point average was also found to be negatively correlated with FLCA (Awan et al., 2010). Many studies reported a negative correlation between foreign language learning success and FLCA (e.g. Demirdaş & Bozdoğan, 2013; Gardner & MacIntyre, 1993; Huang & Hwang, 2013; Lu & Liu, 2015; Onwuegbuzie, Bailey & Daley, 1999; Tuncer & Doğan, 2015). A counter argument was also provided by the researchers who claimed that anxiety was not the reason but the result of poor achievement (Sparks & Ganschow, 1995). FLCA was also investigated in relation with different concepts, such as knowing more languages and self-perceived communication competence (Dewaele, 2010b). It was found that knowing more languages had positive relationship with SPCC and a negative

relationship with FLCA. Of all the skills in language, speaking was claimed to be the most anxiety provoking skill (Young, 1992) and a negative relationship was found between students' speaking course success and their anxiety in foreign language classes (Dalkılıç, 2001).

Researchers also found out the potential sources of foreign language anxiety. To start with, in the context of young learners, being not ready for speaking, fear of making mistakes and failing as well as unfamiliarity with the topics were reported to be the reasons of high anxiety (Aydın, Harputlu, Savran Çelik, Uştuk, & Güzel, 2018). Young (1991) mentioned about learners' and instructors' beliefs about language learning and teaching, testing, classroom procedures, and instructor-learner actions. Foreign language anxiety was also found to stem from learners' personality (Gregersen & Horwitz, 2002), negative experiences in language classes (MacIntyre & Gardner, 1991), and some other individual factors (Gregersen & Horwitz, 2002). One of these individual factors is tolerance of ambiguity, which was found to correlate negatively with foreign language anxiety (Dewaele & Ip, 2013).

Tolerance of ambiguity

The second construct of this study was tolerance of ambiguity. Originally TA was addressed as intolerance of ambiguity by Frenkel-Brunswik (1949), which was later considered as a personality trait determining people's reactions in ambiguous situations. These situations were classified by Budner (1962) into three: new, complex, and contradictory situations. Multiple meanings, vagueness, probability, unstructured and lack of information, uncertainty, contradictions, and unclear cases were found to be the potential causes of ambiguity (Norton, 1975). Tolerance, on the other hand, refers to letting other people express their views, beliefs without refusing and punishing them. Thus, tolerance requires acceptance of these ambiguous situations.

Learning a foreign language creates quite ambiguous situations for learners. Therefore, being tolerant when faced with ambiguous situations in language learning contexts may bring learners success. Although tolerance of ambiguity is considered as a personality trait (Ely, 1989) and it may be hard to change it, setting the balance, which means being neither too much tolerant nor too much intolerant of ambiguities (Brown, 2007) is significant for being successful because these learners are more likely to feel

comfortable when they face uncertain situations (Budner, 1962). It is also a fact that learners with higher levels of TA learn better when they experience risks and interactions; however, low level TA owners like more certain and structured situations (Reid, 1995).

Tolerance of ambiguity has been the main concern of several studies. In one of them, Erten and Topkaya (2009) investigated university students' TA. Female students had less TA compared to male ones. Also, TA was found to be significantly positively correlated with both English proficiency and learners' success in reading. Another study focusing on the effect of gender on AT was conducted in Iranian context (Kamran, 2011). No significant difference was found in terms of gender effect. However, students' average ambiguity tolerance scores were highest in reading activities and the lowest in writing activities. More recently, the relationships among TA, language learning strategies, and emotional intelligence were investigated as well (Nosratinia, Niknam & Sarabchian, 2013; Rastegar & Kermani, 2015). Although no significant relationship was found between emotional intelligence and TA, it was negatively correlated with social strategy (Rastegar & Kermani, 2015). In another recent study, Kocaman and Pamukoğlu (2018) examined the perceptions of Turkish university students with regard to ambiguity tolerance in learning a foreign language. The learners had quite low level of FLCA. Overall language learning strategy use was also found to be significantly related to TA (Nosratinia et al., 2013). Moreover, tolerance of ambiguity was investigated with regard to EFL learners' vocabulary knowledge (Başöz, 2015), reading anxiety and success (Genç, 2016), and multilingualism as well (Dewaele & Wei, 2013). In addition, one of the reasons why TA was considered as a component predicting learners' foreign language anxiety in this paper is that fear of ambiguity was found as a factor constituting FLCA (Thompson & Lee, 2012).

Self-perceived communication competence

The last construct was SPCC, which refers to learners' consideration of their communication competence, based on self-awareness rather than on the actual communication competence (McCroskey & Richmond, 1987). It is mostly associated with willingness to communicate (MacIntyre et al., 1999). However, studies conducted to find its relationship with FLCA indicated a negative relationship between one another (Fahim, 2013).

The only study that has been found to be dealing with the relationships among FLCA, TA, and SPCC was conducted by Dewaele and Ip (2013) in Hong Kong. The results showed a negative relationship between TA and FLCA, and a positive relationship between TA and SPCC. What they based their study on was AUM theory (anxiety/ uncertainty management theory) of Gudykunst (2005) due to his theory's emphasis on the relationship between anxiety and uncertainty. According to his claim, in order to have effective communication, anxiety and uncertainty need to be dealt with carefully especially in the case of situations where interlocutors' differences may create fear and doubts. He also claims that increase in tolerance of ambiguity decreases people's anxiety (Gudykunst, 2005). However, Gudykunst was mostly concerned with the interaction of people from different cultures and the role of tolerance of ambiguity and anxiety. Therefore, in order to throw some more light on the relationships among these constructs and to investigate Turkish EFL students' views regarding them, this study provides a unique perspective by incorporating mixed methodology to deeply investigate these matters.

Methodology

This study made use of mixed methodology design, which refers to combining and associating both qualitative and quantitative methods. The use of both approaches in tandem was preferred so that the study's strength could be better than either just quantitative or qualitative research alone (Creswell, 2003).

Research context and participants

This study was conducted at a 2-year vocational school of a state university in Turkey. Admission to these short-cycle, associate degree programs is based on the scores of the students obtained at centralized nationwide university entrance exams. The participants had diverse English language backgrounds due to their high school types and they did not receive any English preparatory class. They take compulsory General English course for two semesters in their first year.

Quantitative data were gathered from a total of 156 participants who studied at the departments of tourism, business, accountancy, and computer programming. Their

English proficiency level was A2. Majority of the participants were male (61%). Their ages ranged from 18 to 25.

Qualitative data were gathered from four participants who voluntarily joined semi-structured interviews. Their personal information as well as their coding is provided below:

Table 1. Interview participants' personal information

Codes	Age	Gender	Department	Interview duration
P1	21	Female	Tourism	13 min.
P2	19	Male	Tourism	12 min.
P3	20	Female	Accountancy	10 min.
P4	20	Male	Computer programming	13 min.

Instruments and data collection

The quantitative data were gathered by means of three different questionnaires. First of all, FLCA was measured with the Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (FLCAS), which was developed by Horwitz et al. (1986). It included 33 items. Secondly, Tolerance of ambiguity was measured with Ely's (1995) Second Language Tolerance of Ambiguity Scale (SLTAS) including 12 items. These two scales were in a format of 5-point Likert-scale. The last questionnaire was Self-perceived Communication Competence Scale (SPCCS), which included 12 items as well (McCroskey & McCroskey, 1986). It basically examines participants' own perceptions regarding their communication competence relating it to four main communication contexts (pairs, small groups, large meetings, and public speaking) and three types of interlocutors (strangers, acquaintances, and friends). All scales were translated into Turkish by two instructors of English working at a state university and back-translated by the same instructors. Items were also checked for cultural adequacy as the scales were not originally developed for Turkish culture. However, no changes were necessary as, especially FLCAS have been administered to many different nationalities, and the items have been found valid across different cultures (Dalkılıç, 2001). Some demographic information, such as age, department of study, and gender was also embedded at the end of the questionnaires. The Cronbach's alpha internal consistency

reliability scores of FLCAS, SLTAS, and SPCCS were found to be .89, .94, and .85 respectively.

Qualitative data were gathered by means of four personal semi-structured interviews with the students. Interviewing is one of the major qualitative data collection methods, which allows researchers to gain insights about participants' perceptions and thoughts regarding the phenomena under study (Goodwin & Goodwin, 1996). Despite its various alternatives ranging from loosely-structured to highly-structured types, this study made use of semi-structured interview (Mason, 1996), which has the advantage of flexibility (Nunan & Bailey, 2008). A set of questions concerning FLCA, SPCC, and SLTA were used in the interviews. Especially, the highest and the lowest mean-scored items were questioned during the interviews so that they could be investigated deeply.

Data Analysis

In order to answer the first research question, students' perceptions concerning FLCA, SPCC, and SLTA were analyzed through descriptive statistics, including mean scores and standard deviations (SPSS 20). Qualitative data gathered from semi-structured interviews were analyzed through interpretive-descriptive data analysis method by focusing specifically on the maximum and minimum-scored items in all three scales (Maykut & Morehouse, 1994).

For the second research question, first of all, Pearson correlations were used to find out the relationships among FLCA, SPCC, and SLTA because correlation designs provide information to determine what constructs go together in a patterned and predictable way (Nunan & Bailey, 2009). Following this, multiple regression analysis was conducted to evaluate the predictive power of SPCC, and SLTA on FLCA. 10 items in FLCAS were recoded and 14 missing data were estimated with 'expectation maximization algorithm (EM)' before proceeding the analysis.

Findings

R.Q.1. What are the Turkish students' perceptions of their 'perceived communication competence', 'foreign language classroom anxiety', and 'second language tolerance of ambiguity' in English?

Table 2 illustrates the most and the least anxiety provoking situations in language classes.

Table 2. FLCA of the learners

FLCA items	N	M	S.D.
1. I never feel quite sure of myself when I am speaking in my foreign language class.	156	3.00	1.28
2. I don't worry about making mistakes in language class.	156	2.99	1.27
3. I tremble when I know that I'm going to be called on in language class.	156	2.37	1.35
4. It frightens me when I don't understand what the teacher is saying in the foreign language.	156	3.07	1.41
5. It wouldn't bother me at all to take more foreign language classes	156	3.08	1.61
6. During language class, I find myself thinking about things that have nothing to do with the course.	156	2.52	1.30
7. I keep thinking that the other students are better at language than I am	156	2.96	1.38
8. I am usually at case during tests in my language class	156	2.98	1.47
9. I start to panic when I have to speak without preparation in language class	156	3.13	1.38
10. I worry about the consequences of failing my foreign language class.	156	3.22	1.55
11. I don't understand why some people get so upset over foreign language class.	156	2.90	1.42
12. In language class, I can get so nervous I forget things I know	156	2.79	1.41
13. It embarrasses me to volunteer answers in my language class	156	2.61	1.42
14. I would not be nervous speaking the foreign language with native speakers.	156	2.99	1.39
15. I get upset when I don't understand what the teacher is correcting.	156	3.13	1.46
16. Even if I am well prepared for language class, I feel anxious about it	156	3.17	1.39
17. I often feel like not going to my language class.	156	2.39	1.55
18. I feel confident when I speak in foreign language class.	156	3.05	1.29
19. I am afraid that my language teacher is ready to correct every mistake I make.	156	2.56	1.38
20. I can feel my heart pounding when I'm going to be called on in language class.	156	3.20	1.37
21. The more I study for a language test, the more confused I get.	156	2.82	1.45
22. I don't feel pressure to prepare very well for language class	156	2.85	1.47
23. I always feel that the other students speak the foreign language better than I do	156	2.79	1.43
24. I feel very self – conscious about speaking the foreign language in front of other students.	156	2.65	1.26
25. Language class moves so quickly I worry about getting left behind.	156	2.56	1.36
26. I feel more tense and nervous in my language class than in my other classes	156	2.70	1.50

27. I get nervous and confused when I am speaking in my language class	156	2.77	1.40
28. When I'm on my way to language class, I feel very sure and relaxed.	156	2.90	1.45
29. I get nervous when I don't understand every word the language teacher says	156	3.21	1.39
30. I feel overwhelmed by the number of rules you have to learn to speak a foreign language.	156	3.07	1.41
31. I am afraid that the other students will laugh at me when I speak the foreign language.	156	2.67	1.59
32. I would probably feel comfortable around native speakers of the foreign language.	156	2.67	1.41
33. I get nervous when the language teacher asks questions which I haven't prepared in advance.	156	3.14	1.39

Descriptive statistics revealed that participants had moderate level of FLCA (M = 2.93). The leading anxiety provoking item was students' fear of failing English class (item 10) which was followed by not being able to understand every word teacher uses (item 29). Students had different views regarding failing English class. For instance, P4 thinks that the fear of failure creates nervousness just because it decreases his general point average which is very important for his future studies and plans. However for P1, it is directly related to her attitude toward the teacher and the class. She explained it:

I think it is related to your attitude. If we like our teacher and the class, failing a class is not a big deal because I know that just one final exam or midterm exam does not represent all my knowledge. I fail most probably because I did not study well that time. I can study harder and pass that course later on.

Apart from the fear of failure, students also get nervous when they do not understand all the words teacher uses (item 29). However, students' responses in the interviews showed that most of the time they try to guess the overall meaning of the sentence instead of feeling nervous (P1, P4, and P3). P3 explains it: "*I try to guess the meaning of sentence with the help of the words I understand. When I really don't understand, I ask the teacher and he tells me. It doesn't bother me so much because I use my guessing ability*". Being called on in the class by the teacher (item 20) and having to speak in language class when prepared (item 16) or not prepared (item 9) also create anxiety in learners. Especially being in front of other learners make learners feel worried regardless of their preparation for that class. P2 explains it: "*I am nervous about making mistakes. If I speak face to face with someone, I can make it. However, when we do it in class in front of people, I start to feel a kind of fear of making mistakes*".

On the other hand, learners are less anxious about taking part in language classes, getting left behind due to the flow and speed of the class, receiving instant corrections on their mistakes from their teacher, and volunteering answers in the classes. Students think that teachers' organizing ability decreases the worries about getting left behind. P3 states that: "*I think it depends on the teachers' style. For instance, I already know what and how much we will study in the next class. Therefore, I don't need to get nervous about it*". Students also support being corrected at the time of the mistake. P1 states that: "*I think when the teacher corrects my mistake at that moment, it is more effective because I understand that I did exactly that part wrong. So, I understand better. If the teacher corrects me later, I may ignore it*".

Descriptive statistics also showed that students self-perceived communication competence is quite low ($M = 2.44$). Table 3 below shows participants' perceptions of their communication competence in different contexts with different interlocutors.

Table 3. SPCC of the learners

SPCC items	N	M	S.D.
1. Have a small-group conversation in English with acquaintances.	156	2.50	1.15
2. Give a presentation in English to a group of strangers.	156	2.13	1.07
3. Give a presentation in English to a group of friends.	156	2.46	1.26
4. Talk in English at a large meeting among strangers.	156	2.31	1.11
5. Have a small-group conversation in English with strangers.	156	2.38	1.20
6. Talk in English in a large meeting among friends.	156	2.36	1.21
7. Talk in English to friends.	156	2.79	1.22
8. Talk in English in a large meeting with acquaintances.	156	2.51	1.20
9. Talk in English to acquaintances.	156	2.80	1.22
10. Give a presentation in English to a group of acquaintances.	156	2.28	1.20
11. Talk in English to a stranger.	156	2.24	1.23
12. Talk in English to a small group of friends.	156	2.51	1.23

Although students' general SPCC is quite low, they favor talking in English to acquaintances (item 9) and friends (item 7) over strangers. P2 explains the reason: "*I prefer talking in English with my friends because they know as much as I know, so they cannot put me in a funny situation*". In contrast with this view, P4 also claims that: "*I would feel more competent when I speak to strangers because I feel less anxious when*

I talk to them. Because I think they cannot judge me. I don't know about them. So I feel more comfortable". It is also obvious that students try to avoid giving presentations in English to strangers or acquaintances.

Concerning tolerance of ambiguity, first of all, in order to make it clear it should be mentioned that items in SLTAS search for participants' views about the statements describing intolerance of ambiguity in various situations of language learning. Therefore, high mean scores represent low levels of tolerance. Students' views about how tolerant they are toward ambiguities in language classes show that they are not very tolerant when faced with ambiguous situations in learning a language (*M* = 3.68). Item-by-item examination is presented below in Table 4.

Table 4. SLTA of the learners

SLTA items	N	M	S.D.
1. When I'm reading something in English, I feel impatient when I don't totally understand the meaning	156	3.44	1.31
2. It bothers me that I don't understand everything the teacher says in English	156	3.97	1.29
3. When I write English compositions, I don't like it when I can't express my ideas exactly.	156	3.98	1.25
4. It is frustrating that sometimes I don't understand completely some English grammar	156	3.96	1.24
5. I don't like the feeling that my English pronunciation is not quite correct	156	3.91	1.23
6. I don't enjoy reading something in English that takes a while to figure out completely	156	3.41	1.42
7. It bothers me that even though I study English grammar some of it is hard to use in speaking and writing	156	3.65	1.37
8. When I'm writing in English, I don't like the fact that I can't say exactly what I want	156	3.97	1.31
9. It bothers me that even though I study English grammar some of it is hard to use in speaking and writing	156	2.85	1.42
10. When I'm speaking in English, I feel uncomfortable if I can't communicate my idea clearly	156	3.93	1.23
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.	156	3.76	1.26
12. One thing I don't like about reading in English is having to guess what the meaning is	156	3.49	1.28

It is obvious that students are less tolerant when they get stuck in the case of writing (items 3 and 8). P3 explains the potential reason of this situation: "*especially*

when I am speaking I also use body language and I can express myself somehow. However, in writing you need to use the exact word so that your message is understood". Students' responses show that they are not much concerned with complexity of using grammar in speaking and understanding each and every word in reading activities which means they are more tolerant with these issues. P2 emphasizes the importance of the ability to compensate unknown words with the ones they know and their ability to guess the overall meaning in order to be more tolerant when they face ambiguities.

R.Q.2. Do 'perceived communication competence' and 'second language tolerance of ambiguity' predict the students' 'foreign language classroom anxiety' in Turkish context?

In order to find answer to the second research question, correlation analysis was run before multiple regression analysis was carried out. Table 5 presents the results.

Table 5. Correlation matrix of FLCA, SPCC, and SLTA

	(1)	(2)	(3)
(1) **FLCA**	-	-.40**	.41**
(2) **SPCC**	-.40**	-	-.19*
(3) **SLTA**	.41**	-.19*	-

** p<0.01 level

* p< 0.05 level

Results indicate that FLCA is significantly negatively correlated with SPCC (r= -.40), p<.01; and significantly positively correlated with SLTA (r= .41), p<.01. In addition, SLTA is also negatively correlated with SPCC (r= -.19), p<.05. It shows that when one's SPCC increases, his/her FLCA and SLTA show a decrease. Moreover, increase in one's SLTA goes together with his/her FLCA. When the statement above about SLTA is taken into consideration, it can be claimed that increase in SLTA score represents decrease in students' tolerance toward ambiguities in language learning. Therefore, according to results, when students' tolerance decreases, while their FLCA increases; their SPCC decreases. Multiple regression analysis results, which are basically based on the results above, are illustrated in Table 6.

Table 6. Multiple regression model of SPCC and SLTA as predictors of FLCA

	Beta	SE of Beta.	t	p
SPCC	-.68	.14	-4.72	.00*
SLTA	.80	.16	4.84	.00*

*p< .05

R= .520, R2 =.270, Adj. R2 = .261, SE= 19.14

Multiple regression analysis was conducted to find out the predictive power of SPCC and SLTA on FLCA. In this model, SPCC and SLTA were independent; FLCA was the dependent variable. Firstly, both SPCC and SLTA were found to be significant predictors of FLCA. The total data accounts for R2adj = 26%. Secondly, with other variables held constant, while SPCC was negatively related to FLCA, decreasing by .68 for every point in FLCA; SLTA was positively related to FLCA, increasing .80 for every point in FLCA. It should also be stated here that, according to the nature of SLTAS, .80 point increase in SLTA score means actually decrease in their tolerance level toward ambiguities. Finally, the model was statistically significant (p=.000). SPCC and SLTA were found to be the significant predictors of FLCA. The results indicated that SPCC and SLTA explained 26% of the variance in FLCA of Turkish students in English language classes.

Discussion and conclusion

The results of this study revealed that freshmen studying at a Turkish state university had moderate level of anxiety in their English language classes. However, they perceived themselves quite incompetent in English communication and also they found themselves quite intolerant when faced with ambiguities in the context of language learning. The results concerning students' tolerance of ambiguity were quite similar with those of Başöz (2015), Erten and Topkaya (2009), Genç, (2016), Kazamina (1999), and Kocaman and Pamukoğlu, (2018). With learners' increasing level of linguistic knowledge in a specific language, the need to control over every detail in learning a language decreases. This results in higher level of tolerance of ambiguity (Erten & Topkaya, 2009). From this perspective, the learners' English proficiency level in this study as well as low level of SPCC may be the potential reasons of having low tolerance of ambiguity.

The results concerning participants' self-perceived communication competence were also in accordance with the ones found in the study of Asmalı et al. (2015). In both studies students in Turkish context had quite low levels of SPCC and they felt themselves more communicatively competent in English when they talk to their friends.

The results regarding the second research question showed that students had less foreign language classroom anxiety when they had higher levels of both tolerance of ambiguity and self-perceived communication competence. This finding was also supported by the results of Dewaele and Ip (2013), who investigated the same relationships among these three constructs in Hong Kong with the participation of young adults. As the results of the study of Dewaele and Ip (2013), this study also confirms Gudykunst's AUM theory's axiom 13, which is related with inverse relationship between tolerance of ambiguity and anxiety as well. Similarly, SLTA was also found as the strong predictor of reading anxiety which is also in line with the findings of the current study (Genç, 2016).

Despite the scarcity of studies focusing on the effect of tolerance of ambiguity and self-perceived communication competence on foreign language classroom anxiety, it can be claimed that learners from different cultures and with different first language backgrounds tend to have less FLCA when they are more tolerant toward ambiguities and when they feel themselves more competent in that language.

It is quite understandable that foreign language learners with A2 level face ambiguities during the language learning process because they start from bottom of the ladder with doubts about grammatical structures, pronunciation, and potential different meanings of the same word. All of which can be anxiety provoking for these learners (Ely, 1995; Erhman, 1998). However, at one point or another, learners will feel anxious especially in foreign language classrooms because it is perceived as characteristic showing up in ambiguous situations (Bochner, 1965). What is important at this point is how teachers help learners control and keep it up at an ideal level with increasing their tolerance of ambiguity and how competent they feel themselves in English.

One of the implications drawn from this study is that teachers of English, specifically the ones teaching English to lower proficiency levels, need to be very clear about their contents and expectations from the students so that no ambiguous situations

can appear and they can feel more comfortable during this anxiety-provoking process. The ambiguities resulting from the nature of learning a new language may be eliminated by increasing students self-perceived communication competence in English. In order to accomplish this, learners' needs may be investigated and activities with optimum level of challenge may be conducted. Adopting students' preferences in activity type may help learners develop higher SPCC as well. Strategies to compensate lacks of the students may be taught so that students can have higher SPCC, which may in return help them develop higher tolerance when faced with ambiguities and less anxiety in foreign language classes. Teachers may also emphasize the significance of making mistakes in language classes because learners learn much better when they try, receive feedback about mistakes, and finally use the correct version. Therefore, teachers should encourage students to take part in the activities in their classes in an anxiety-free atmosphere.

The present study had some limitations as well. First of all, despite the support of qualitative interview data, it was limited with small sample size in only one cultural and educational context. Therefore, future researchers may investigate learners from different cultures, from different first language backgrounds, and with higher English proficiency levels. Moreover, self-perceived communication competence was among the constructs of this study. Although participants honestly expressed their SPCC, participants' GPA may also be investigated. Additionally, the explained variance was only 26% in this study, which shows that there are further constructs interrelated with students' foreign language anxiety that may be integrated in this model in future research.

Notes on the contributors

Mehmet Asmalı (Ph.D.) is an EFL instructor at Alanya Alaaddin Keykubat University, School of Foreign Languages, Alanya / Antalya, Turkey. Mehmet Asmalı is interested in English Language Teaching, cross-cultural pragmatics, teacher education, and individual differences in language learning.

References

Al-Saraj, T. M. (2014). Revisiting the foreign language classroom anxiety scale (FLCAS): The anxiety of female English language learners in Saudi Arabia. *L2 Journal, 6*, 49-76.

Amiri, M., & Ghonsooly, B. (2015). The relationship between English learning anxiety and the students' achievement on examinations. *Journal of Language Teaching and Research, 6* (4), 855-865.

Arnold, J., & Brown, H. D. (1999). A map of the terrain. In J. Arnold (Eds.), *Affect in language learning* (pp. 1−24). Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.

Asmalı, M., Bilki, U., & Duban, C. A. (2015). A comparison of the Turkish and Romanian students' willingness to communicate and its affecting factors in English. *Journal of Language and Linguistic Studies, 11*, 59-74.

Awan, R. N., Azher, M., Anwar, M. N., & Naz, A. (2010). An investigation of foreign language classroom anxiety and its relationship with students' achievement. *Journal of College Teaching & Learning, 7*, 11-33.

Aydın, S., Harputlu, L., Savran Çelik, Ş, Uştuk, Ö., & Güzel, S. (2018). A descriptive study on foreign language anxiety among children. *Hacettepe University Journal of Education, 33*(1), 229-241.

Bailey, K. M. (1983). Competitiveness and anxiety in adult second language learning: Looking *at* and *through* the diary studies. In Seliger, H. W., & Long, M. H. (Eds.), *Classroom oriented research in second language acquisition* (pp. 67-103). Rowley, MA: Newbury House.

Başöz, T. (2015). Exploring the relationship between tolerance of ambiguity of EFL learners and their vocabulary knowledge. *Journal of Language and Linguistic Studies, 11*, 53-66.

Blau, A. (1955). A unitary hypothesis of emotion: Anxiety, emotions of displeasure, and affective disorders. *The Psychoanalytic Quarterly, 24*, 75–103.

Bochner, S. (1965). Defining intolerance of ambiguity. *Psychological Record*, *15*, 393-400.

Brown, H. D. (2007). *Principles of language learning and teaching (5th ed.).* White Plains, NY: Pearson Education.

Brown, D. (1994). *Principles of language learning and teaching*. Englewood Cliff: Prentice Hall Regent.

Budner, S. (1962). Intolerance of ambiguity as a personality variable. *Journal of Personality, 30*, 29-50.

Chapelle, C. A. & Roberts, C. (1986). Ambiguity tolerance and field independence as predicators of proficiency in English as a second language. *Language learning, 36*, 27-45.

Chastain, K. (1988). *Developing second language skills: Theory practice*. San Diego: Harcourt Brace Javonich.

Creswell, J. W. (2003). *Research design: Qualitative, quantitative and mixed method approaches (2ₙₐ ed.)*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Dalkılıç, N. (2001). The role of foreign language classroom anxiety in English speaking courses. *Journal of Çukurova University Institute of Social Sciences*, *8*, 70-82.

Demirdaş, Ö., & Bozdoğan, D. (2013). Foreign language anxiety and performance of language learners in preparatory classes. *Turkish Journal of Education, 2*(3), 4-13.

Dewaele, J-M., & Ip, T. S. (2013). The link between foreign language classroom anxiety, second language tolerance of ambiguity and self-rated English proficiency among Chinese learners. *Studies in Second Language Learning and Teaching*, *3*, 47-66.

Dewaele, J-M., & Wei, L. (2013). Is multilingualism linked to a higher tolerance of ambiguity? *Bilingualism: Language and Cognition, 16*(1), 231–240.

Dewaele, J-M. (2010b). Multilingualism and affordances: Variation in self-perceived communicative competence and communicative anxiety in French L1, L2, L3, and L4. *International Review of Applied Linguistics*, *48*, 105-129.

Dörnyei, Z. (2005). *The psychology of the language learner, individual differences in second language acquisition*. New Jersey: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates Publishers.

Elaldı, Ş. (2016). Foreign language anxiety of students studying English language and literature: A sample from Turkey. *Educational Research and Reviews, 11*(6), 219-228.

Ellis, R. (1996). *The study of second language acquisition.* Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Ely, C. M. (1995). Tolerance of ambiguity and the teaching of ESL. In J. M. Reid (Eds.), *Learning styles in the ESL/EFL classroom* (pp. 216-217). New York: Heinle & Heinle.

Ely, C. M. (1989). Tolerance of ambiguity and use of second language strategies. *Foreign Language Annals*, *22*, 437-445.

Erten, İ. H., & Topkaya, E. Z. (2009). Understanding tolerance of ambiguity of EFL learners in reading classes at tertiary level. *Novitas-royal, 3*, 29-44.

Fahim, M. (2013). Communication competence: Is it related to foreign language anxiety and willingness to communicate? *Journal of American Science, 9*, 35-39.

Frenkel-Brunswick, E. (1949). Intolerance of ambiguity as an emotional and perceptual personality variable. *Journal of Personality*, *11*, 108−143.

Gardner, R. C., & MacIntyre, P. D. (1993). A student's contributions to second language learning. Part II: Affective variables. *Language Teaching, 26*, 1−11.

Genç, G. (2016). Can ambiguity tolerance, success in reading, and gender predict the foreign language reading anxiety? *Journal of Language and Linguistic Studies, 12*(2), 135-151.

Goodwin, L. W., & Goodwin, L. D. (1996). *Understanding quantitative and qualitative research in early childhood education*. New York: Teachers College Press.

Gregersen, T., & Horwitz, E. K. (2002). Language learning and perfectionism: Anxious and non-anxious language learners' reactions to their own oral performance. *The Modern Language Journal, 86*, 562–570.

Gudykunst, W. B. (2005). An anxiety/uncertainty management (AUM) theory of strangers' intercultural adjustment. In W. B. Gudykunst (Eds.), *Theorizing about intercultural communication* (pp. 419-457). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Hembree, R. (1988). Correlates, causes, effects, and treatment of test anxiety. *Review of Educational Research, 58*, 47-77.

Horwitz, E. K., & Young, D. J. (1991). *Language anxiety: From theory and research to classroom implications.* Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice Hall

Horwitz, E. K., Horwitz, M. B., & Cope, J. (1986). Foreign language classroom anxiety. *The Modern Language Journal, 70*, 125–132.

Huang, P., & Hwang, Y. (2013). An exploration of EFL learners' anxiety and e-learning environments. *Journal of Language Teaching and Research, 4*(1) 27-35.

Kamran, K. S. (2011). Effect of gender on ambiguity tolerance of Iranian English language learners. *Journal of Education and Practice, 2*, 25-34.

Kazamina, V. (1999). How tolerant are Greek EFL learners of foreign language ambiguities. *Leeds Working Papers in Linguistics*, 7, 69-78.

Kocaman, O. & Pamukoğlu, M. (2018). Exploring the perceptions of EFL learners on ambiguity tolerance: Sakarya University sample. *Sakarya University Journal of Education, 8*(2), 224-233.

Lu, Z., & Liu, M. (2015). An investigation of Chinese university EFL learner's foreign language reading anxiety, reading strategy use and reading comprehension performance. *Studies in Second Language Learning and Teaching, 5*, 65-85.

Lucas, J. (1984). Communication apprehension in the ESL classroom: Getting our students to talk. *Foreign Language Annals*, 17, 593-598.

MacIntyre, P. D., Babin, P. A., & Clément, R. (1999). Willingness to communicate: Antecedents and consequences. *Communication Quarterly, 47*, 215– 229.

MacIntyre, P. D., Noels, K. A., & Clément, R. (1997). Biases in self-ratings of second language proficiency: The role of language anxiety. *Language Learning*, 47, 265-287.

Macintyre, P. D., & Charos, C. (1996). Personality, attitudes, and affect as predictors of second language communication. *Journal of Language and Social Psychology, 15,* 3-26.

MacIntyre, P. D., & Gardner, R. C. (1991). Language anxiety: Its relationship to other anxieties and to processing in native and second languages. *Language Learning, 41*, 513– 534.

Mason, J. (1996). *Qualitative researching*. London: Sage.

Maykut, P., & Morehouse, R. (1994). *Beginning qualitative research: A philosophic and practical guide.* London: Falmer Press.

McCroskey, J. C., & Richmond, V. P. (1987). Willingness to communicate and interpersonal communication. In J. C. McCroskey, & J. A. Daly (Eds.), *Personality and interpersonal communication* (pp. 129-159). Newbury Park, CA: Sage.

McCroskey, J. C., & McCroskey, L. L. (1986). Self-report as an approach to measuring communication competence. *Communication Research Reports, 5*, 108-113.

Mesri, F. (2012). The relationship between gender and Iranian EFL Learners' foreign language classroom anxiety (FLCA). *International Journal of Academic Research in Business and Social Sciences, 2*, 147-156.

Norton, R.W. (1975). Measurement of ambiguity tolerance. *Journal of Personality Assessment, 39*, 607-619.

Nosratinia, M., Niknam, M., & Sarabchian, E. (2013). The role of emotional intelligence and tolerance of ambiguity in predicting EFL learners' language learning strategies. *IOSR Journal of Humanities and Social Science (IOSR-JHSS), 17*(1), 22-29.

Nunan, D. & Bailey, K.M. (2008). *Exploring second language classroom research: A comprehensive guide*. Boston: Heinle.

Onwuegbuzie, A. J., Bailey, P., & Daley, C. E. (1999). Factors associated with foreign language anxiety. *Applied Psycholinguistics*, *20*, 217–239.

Pekrun, R., Goetz, T., Titz, W., & Perry, R. P. (2002). Academic emotions in students' self-regulated learning and achievement: A program of qualitative and quantitative research. *Educational Psychologist, 37*(2), 91-105.

Price, M. L. (1991). The subjective experience of foreign language anxiety: Interviews with anxious students. In E. K. Horwitz, & D. J. Young (Eds.), *Language anxiety: From theory and research to classroom implications* (pp. 101-108). Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall.

Rastegar, M., & Kermani, M. E. (2015). Emotional intelligence, tolerance of ambiguity, and language learning strategies use of EFL learners: A study of relations. *Cumhuriyet University Faculty of Science Journal (CSJ), 36*(3), 1961-1971.

Reid, J. (1995). *Learning styles in the ESL/EFL classroom*. Boston: Heinle & Heinle.

Samimy, K. K., & Rardin, J. P. (1994). Adult language learners' affective reactions to community language learning: A descriptive study. *Foreign Language Annals, 27*, 379-390.

Sparks, R. L., & Ganschow, L. (1995). A strong inference approach to causal factors in foreign language learning: A response to MacIntyre. *The Modern Language Journal*, *79*(ii), 235-244.

Thompson, A. S., & Lee, J. (2012). Anxiety and EFL: Does multilingualism matter? *International Journal of Bilingual Education and Bilingualism, 16*(6), 730-749

Tuncer, M., & Doğan, Y. (2015). Effect of foreign language classroom anxiety on Turkish university students' academic achievement in foreign language learning. *Journal of Education and Training Studies, 3*(6), 14-19.

Young, D. J. (1992). Language anxiety from the foreign language specialist's perspective: Interviews with Krashen, Omaggio Hadley, Terrell, and Rardin. *Foreign Language Annals, 25*(2), 157-172.

Young, D. J. (1991). Creating a low-anxiety classroom environment: What does the language anxiety research suggest? *The Modern Language Journal, 75*, 425-439

Young, D. J. (1991). The relationship between anxiety and foreign language oral proficiency ratings. In Horwitz, E. K., & Young, D. J. (Eds.) *Language anxiety: From theory and research to classroom implications* (pp. 57-63). Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall.

Young, D. J. (1986). The relationship between anxiety and foreign language oral proficiency ratings. *Foreign Language Annals*, *19*, 439-445.

Zhanibek, A. (2001). *The relationship between language anxiety and students' participation in foreign language classes* (Unpublished master thesis). Bilkent University, Turkey.