

RESEARCH ARTICLE

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Foreign language anxiety in middle school students: a case study^{3*}

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Highlights:

- Foreign language anxiety from the perspectives of students and teachers.
- Symptoms that will be useful in identifying students experiencing foreign language anxiety.
- The causes of foreign language anxiety and their interrelationships.
- Tested methods for coping with foreign language anxiety.

Abstract

The research aims to understand and analyse foreign language anxiety in secondary school students from both student and teacher perspectives across various dimensions. The research was designed as a case study involving a research group of 35 secondary students and 13 English teachers from the same state school in Istanbul during the 2021-2022 academic year. Data were collected through semi-structured interview forms and observation notes taken by the researcher and were analysed using the descriptive content analysis method. The results indicate that students exhibit physical symptoms (such as stuttering, trembling, and freezing), psychological symptoms (including nervousness and fear), and cognitive symptoms (such as forgetfulness and lack of motivation) associated with foreign language anxiety. The causes of this anxiety are related to the learner, the teacher, and the teaching system. Student-related causes include peer pressure, fear of making mistakes, insufficient knowledge, challenges in learning vocabulary, and an authoritarian family attitude, among others. Teacher-related factors causing foreign language anxiety include strict teacher attitudes, the provision of immediate and continuous feedback, and inadequate teacher qualifications. Factors related to the teaching system encompass an exam-oriented approach, grammar-focused instruction, limited teaching hours, and insufficient textbook coverage. The consequences of foreign language anxiety experienced by students include academic failure, learned helplessness, and a decline in interest and participation in the classroom. Both students and teachers employ various strategies to cope with foreign language anxiety, such as utilizing technology, promoting peer learning, and fostering a positive learning environment. The results show that although all students acknowledge the necessity of foreign language learning in their social lives and education, recognize its potential to facilitate their career choices, and agree that English is a universal language, every student in the study group, which included both students with and without foreign language anxiety, has experienced foreign language anxiety.

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1. Introduction

English is an international language widely recognized as a global means of communication. Therefore, learning English is vital in Turkey, and it is one of the compulsory subjects in the national education curriculum. Furthermore, foreign language learning now begins at an earlier age due to the introduction of the revised curriculum. Although English lessons are compulsory at all grade levels and foreign language learning starts early with enhancements to the curriculum, the effectiveness of language acquisition remains less than satisfactory compared to previous years (Coşkun-Demirpolat, 2015). Various studies have explored the reasons for this shortcoming in the language learning process, each providing different explanations (Durmuşçelebi & Suna, 2013). According to Demirel (1999), language learning is a complex process influenced by numerous variables. Among these, affective variables are particularly significant in elucidating the challenges faced in foreign language acquisition. Affective variables include motivation, language learning strategies, and anxiety, which can either facilitate or hinder a language learner's progress (Kılıç, 2017). Keskinçelik (2006) identifies anxiety, motivation, readiness, individual differences, and attention as key affective factors that impact learning. However, these affective factors are often overlooked in schools (Kuzgun, 2011).

Anxiety has long been recognized as a significant challenge for both foreign language teachers and learners. As one of the key factors influencing learning, anxiety manifests as foreign language anxiety within the context of language learning. Accumulated evidence indicates that anxiety consistently has a negative impact on foreign language learning (Teimouri et al., 2019). Horwitz et al. (1986) were the first to introduce the concept of foreign language anxiety as specific to language learning, defining it as a set of self-perceptions, emotions, and behaviors arising from the uncertainties of the learning process. MacIntyre and Gardner (1994) define foreign language anxiety as a fear that arises in situations requiring the use of the language by individuals who are not fully proficient. They describe it as tension concerning speaking, listening, and learning the target language. Numerous studies have concluded that foreign language anxiety negatively affects language learning. For instance, Wörde (2003, p. 1) found that students experiencing foreign language anxiety tend to learn less and struggle to demonstrate what they have learned. Consequently, these students experience more failures, which in turn exacerbates their anxiety. Similarly, Zhu (2024) stated that anxiety may lead students to be more hesitant and self-censored in their language output, thus affecting their fluency and accuracy. According to Kianinezhad (2024), the impact of foreign language anxiety on language learners is profound and far-reaching, extending beyond the academic realm. It casts a shadow over their educational journey, leading to diminished performance, hindered language acquisition, and, in some cases, discouraging students from pursuing further language studies. Moreover, anxious learners adversely affect their engagement, motivation, and learning experience. Therefore, recognizing foreign language anxiety as a multidimensional concern is of utmost significance for teachers and learners. In other words, to mitigate this issue, it is crucial to understand how both students and teachers perceive foreign language anxiety. Specifically, examining how teachers observe anxiety in the classroom, how they cope with these situations, the potential consequences of anxiety, and the strategies they employ to minimize it will contribute to a deeper understanding of foreign language anxiety and inform preventive measures. Similarly, considering students' perspectives on this issue will provide valuable insights for English teachers, researchers, and curriculum developers aimed at enhancing foreign language instruction. In this context, the research problem focuses on the lack of knowledge regarding the process of foreign language anxiety as perceived by both students and teachers.

The research distinguishes itself from other studies by examining foreign language anxiety in depth through a case study approach, informed by the researcher's long-term observations at her workplace. It also incorporates the perspectives of two study groups that experience foreign language anxiety most acutely. Understanding students' experiences with foreign language anxiety could assist English language teachers in planning and implementing effective educational strategies while providing new insights and perspectives. Furthermore, the thoughts and observations of English language teachers regarding foreign language anxiety in the classroom and the solutions they have implemented could offer valuable guidance to their colleagues. In this regard, the research gathers data from primary sources and interprets

the findings from multiple perspectives, analyzing foreign language anxiety from both learners' and teachers' viewpoints. This approach is expected to make a significant contribution to existing literature.

Given the prevalence of foreign language anxiety and its impact on language learning, it is reasonable to expect both foreign language students and teachers to be aware of it. Nevertheless, despite the importance of foreign language anxiety by researchers from various countries, the extent to which foreign language students and teachers recognize it as an issue remains an open question. Furthermore, it is unclear whether foreign language teachers and students accurately understand the nature of foreign language anxiety and whether they hold a positive or negative view of it (Tran et al., 2012). In this context, the research aims to explore the symptoms, causes, consequences, and coping strategies related to foreign language anxiety that secondary school students encounter while learning a foreign language, from both learners' and teachers' perspectives. In line with this overall objective, the research questions are as follows:

- a) What is the level of foreign language anxiety perceived by secondary school students?
- b) What are secondary school students' foreign language anxiety symptoms?
- c) What causes secondary school students' foreign language anxiety?
- d) What are the consequences of secondary school students' foreign language anxiety?
- e) How do you cope with secondary school students' foreign language anxiety?

2. Method

2.1. Research Design

The research was conducted as a case study, one of the qualitative research methods. A case study involves an intensive, holistic description and analysis (Merriam, 1998, p. 27). It is defined as a method of in-depth investigation into an event or situation encountered in daily life (Glesne, 2020) or as studies that examine a limited system and context, utilizing multiple sources of information (Creswell, 1998). The primary aim of a case study is to provide a detailed description of phenomena by focusing on a particular entity or phenomenon (the case), defined by the unit of analysis rather than the subject of inquiry. A specific program (a bounded system) chosen because it was typical, exceptional, or extremely successful, etc., would be the unit of analysis for the case study (Merriam, 2002). Given these characteristics, a case study was deemed appropriate for this research. It aims to explore foreign language anxiety (its symptoms, causes, consequences, and coping strategies) in depth within a particular unit, utilizing multiple sources of information such as student experiences and teacher opinions. The research was conducted as a case study with a holistic approach in a typical state secondary school, where the researcher (the first author of this article) works as an English teacher and has previously observed instances of foreign language anxiety. While a holistic approach is employed to understand the foreign language concerns of secondary school students, the study also incorporates the perspectives of both teachers and students involved in the process. Furthermore, an attempt has been made to reveal the interconnections among the various components of foreign language anxiety, including its symptoms, causes, and consequences. According to Merriam (1988), the case study serves as an ideal model for understanding and interpreting observations of educational situations and events. Therefore, since this research aims to investigate foreign language anxiety within educational contexts, it is most appropriate and effective to conduct the study as a case study.

2.2. Study Group

The study group consisted of 35 secondary school students (19 female, 16 male) attending a state school in the Sancaktepe district of Istanbul during the 2021-2022 academic year, as well as 10 English teachers (10 female, 3 male) employed at the same institution. The school is a state institution where the researcher has worked as an English teacher for seven years and is representative of typical state schools. To select the study group, which comprised both secondary school students and English teachers, the researcher employed the maximum variation sampling technique—a purposive sampling method. The aim of maximum variation sampling was to identify commonalities and patterns among students and teachers

with diverse characteristics, thereby providing a deeper and broader understanding of foreign language anxiety. To create heterogeneous study groups, the researcher interviewed teachers with varying backgrounds, including differences in their academic background, years of seniority, and gender. From these interviews, the researcher identified students who could participate in the study, ensuring the inclusion of those who represented the greatest diversity. This diversity was achieved by selecting students with distinct characteristics, such as grade level, anxiety level, academic achievement, parental knowledge of English, and gender, all of which can significantly influence foreign language anxiety. To assess the foreign language anxiety of the students, English teachers were interviewed, and based on their observations, students who were considered to have high anxiety, as well as those who exhibited no anxiety, were identified. These students were subsequently included in the study group based on their voluntary consent. Additionally, during the interviews, students were asked to evaluate their perceived level of anxiety by rating it on a scale from 1 to 4 (1- Not at all anxious, 2- Rarely anxious, 3- Quite anxious, 4- Very anxious). The inclusion of students who reported not experiencing foreign language anxiety in the study group was based on the researcher's professional observations, which indicated that even those students who did not appear anxious exhibited signs of foreign language anxiety in specific contexts. The demographic information, such as grade level, perceived foreign language anxiety, and academic achievement of the students in the study group, is presented in detail in Table 1.

Table 1. The demographic information about students

Student	Gender	Grade Level	Academic Achievement	Perceived Anxiety Level	Parental Knowledge of English	Private Lesson
S1	Female	5 th Grade	85-100	Quite Anxious	No	No
S2	Female	5 th Grade	85-100	Rarely Anxious	No	No
S3	Female	5 th Grade	45-54	Quite Anxious	No	No
S4	Female	5 th Grade	70-84	Very Anxious	Yes	No
S5	Male	5 th Grade	85-100	Not at all Anxious	Yes	No
S6	Male	5 th Grade	85-100	Rarely Anxious	No	No
S7	Female	5 th Grade (IFLC)	85-100	Quite Anxious	No	No
S8	Female	5 th Grade (IFLC)	85-100	Rarely Anxious	No	Yes
S9	Female	5 th Grade (IFLC)	85-100	Rarely Anxious	Yes	No
S10	Male	5 th Grade (IFLC)	85-100	Quite Anxious	Yes	No
S11	Male	5 th Grade (IFLC)	85-100	Not at all Anxious	No	Yes
S12	Female	5 th Grade (IFLC)	85-100	Quite Anxious	Yes	No
S13	Female	6 th Grade	85-100	Not at all Anxious	No	Yes
S14	Female	6 th Grade	85-100	Rarely Anxious	No	No
S15	Female	6 th Grade	85-100	Rarely Anxious	Yes	No
S16	Male	6 th Grade	85-100	Rarely Anxious	No	No
S17	Female	6 th Grade	85-100	Rarely Anxious	Yes	No
S18	Male	6 th Grade	70-84	Quite Anxious	No	No
S19	Male	7 th Grade	85-100	Rarely Anxious	No	No
S20	Male	7 th Grade	85-100	Rarely Anxious	Yes	No
S21	Male	7 th Grade	85-100	Rarely Anxious	Yes	No
S22	Female	7 th Grade	85-100	Not at all Anxious	No	No
S23	Female	7 th Grade	85-100	Quite Anxious	Yes	No
S24	Male	7 th Grade	70-84	Quite Anxious	No	No
S25	Male	8 th Grade	85-100	Rarely Anxious	No	No
S26	Female	8 th Grade	85-100	Quite Anxious	Yes	No
S27	Male	8 th Grade	85-100	Rarely Anxious	No	No
S28	Female	8 th Grade	45-54	Very Anxious	No	No
S29	Female	8 th Grade	85-100	Quite Anxious	No	No
S30	Male	8 th Grade (IFLC)	85-100	Quite Anxious	No	No
S31	Male	8 th Grade (IFLC)	70-84	Very Anxious	No	No
S32	Female	8 th Grade (IFLC)	70-84	Very Anxious	No	Yes
S33	Female	8 th Grade (IFLC)	85-100	Rarely Anxious	No	No

S34	Female	8 th Grade (IFLC)	85-100	Not at all Anxious	No	Yes
S35	Male	8 th Grade (IFLC)	85-100	Quite Anxious	No	No

A total of 35 students (19 female and 16 male) were selected for the study group, ensuring that at least five students were included from each grade level. Additionally, students enrolled in Intensive Foreign Language Classes (IFLC) were also part of the study. The academic achievement scores of the participating students ranged from 45 to 100. Among them, four students reported attending a course or taking private lessons to improve their English, while 31 indicated that they did not. Students were asked to rate their levels of foreign language anxiety during the interviews, and their perceived anxiety levels were evaluated. With the exception of five students, it was noted that the remaining students experienced varying degrees of anxiety. Ultimately, a study group was formed based on whether the students' parents were proficient in English. The demographic information regarding the teachers in the study group is presented in detail in Table 2.

Table 2. The demographic information about teachers

Teacher	Gender	Seniority Year	Grade Levels He/She Teaches	The Graduated Faculty	Teaching in IFLC
T1	Female	9 Years	5 th Grade	Faculty of Education	Yes
T2	Female	10 Years	5 th Grade	Faculty of Education	Yes
T3	Female	8 Years	8 th Grade	Faculty of Science and Literature	No
T4	Female	8 Years	5 th Grade	Faculty of Education	Yes
T5	Female	5 Years	5 th Grade 8 th Grade	Faculty of Education	Yes
T6	Female	10 Years	6 th Grade 8 th Grade	Faculty of Science and Literature	Yes
T7	Male	8 Years	7 th Grade	Faculty of Education	No
T8	Female	13 Years	6 th Grade	Faculty of Science and Literature	No
T9	Male	8 Years	7 th Grade	Faculty of Education	No
T10	Female	9 Years	5 th Grade 7 th Grade	Faculty of Education	Yes
T11	Female	8 Years	5 th Grade 7 th Grade 8 th Grade	Faculty of Science and Literature	Yes
T12	Male	10 Years	6 th Grade 7 th Grade 8 th Grade	Faculty of Science and Literature	Yes
T13	Female	19 Years	6 th Grade	Faculty of Education	No

Teachers were selected to represent a variety of factors, including years of seniority, gender, grade levels taught, the faculties from which they graduated, and their experience in intensive foreign language classes. In the school where the study was conducted, there are 17 English teachers, of whom 13 (ten female and three male) participated voluntarily. The seniority of these teachers ranged from 3 to 19 years. Eight of the participants graduated from the Faculty of Education, while five graduated from the Faculty of Science and Literature. Additionally, eight teachers reported having experience in intensive foreign language classes, whereas five indicated that they had never worked in such classes.

2.3. Data Collection Tools

After identifying the focus of the study, the researcher should collect data directly and comprehensively through interviews, observations, and documents to gather information about the situation (Creswell, 1998). To ensure a systematic and thorough data collection process, semi-structured interview forms and observation notes prepared by the researcher were used as data collection tools. The introduction section of the forms included demographic information about the students and teachers. During the preparation of the interview questions, the researcher reviewed relevant literature and previous studies, as well as conducted pilot applications. The pilot application of the semi-structured interview form for students was carried out with an eighth-grade student in an intensive foreign language class at the same state secondary school. The pilot application of the semi-structured interview form for

teachers was conducted with an English teacher who had eight years of professional experience at a state secondary school in the same region. This school shared similar characteristics, including student numbers, class size, facilities, and the competencies of the teaching staff. Based on the results of the pilot applications, the researcher made improvements to the interview forms by consulting the expert opinion of the thesis supervisor. In accordance with the expert feedback, it was determined that some questions received similar responses, leading to their subsequent consolidation. Two questions were found to be unclear, prompting the addition of new questions for clarification. Furthermore, based on the pilot applications and expert feedback, it was deemed necessary to incorporate additional questions into the interview. For instance, the emphasis on test anxiety during the pilot applications resulted in the inclusion of questions aimed at better defining the role of test anxiety in foreign language anxiety. Therefore, a question regarding which types of questions (e.g., open-ended questions, fill-in-the-blank, matching, etc.) cause foreign language anxiety in English exams was included in the interview forms. In the final version, the student interview form comprises eleven questions, three of which focus on their perceived foreign language anxiety and attitudes toward language learning. Three questions investigate the causes of foreign language anxiety, one addresses its symptoms, two examine its consequences, and two explore coping strategies. The final version of the teachers' interview form contains ten questions. The first question addresses students' general foreign language anxiety, while three questions explore its causes, one addresses the symptoms, two focus on the effects, and three examine coping strategies.

After completing the interviews, the observation process for the study was conducted by the researcher herself. As a practitioner, the researcher observed spontaneous events related to foreign language anxiety in the three classes she was teaching, ensuring systematic and continuous monitoring. To minimize bias in the observation notes, the researcher employed an observation form that encompassed the dimensions and sub-dimensions of foreign language anxiety, which were developed based on the findings from the interviews. The goal was to gain a deeper understanding of the data by analyzing the recorded observation notes. According to Yıldırım and Şimşek (2013), observation enables the researcher to examine the subject from multiple perspectives and achieve an in-depth understanding by directly observing behaviors. Therefore, to monitor foreign language anxiety, the researcher documented spontaneous instances of anxiety in the classroom as a natural part of the learning process.

2.4. Data Analysis

The data obtained from the study were analyzed using descriptive content analysis. In this approach, the findings are summarized and interpreted according to predetermined themes. The objective is to systematically and clearly describe the data, followed by an explanation and interpretation of these descriptions (Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2013, p. 256). The MAXQDA (2022) software was employed to identify and categorize themes and codes. Key sections of the interview forms imported into the MAXQDA software were coded and organized into relevant themes and sub-themes. For instance, expressions such as sweating, blushing, stuttering, and trembling hands were coded and categorized under the sub-theme of physiological symptoms of foreign language anxiety. Additionally, the MAXQDA software facilitated easy and rapid access to direct quotations.

In the initial phase of data analysis, the researcher transcribed each participant's audio file into text. To ensure thorough data immersion, it is essential for the researcher to listen to the interviews at least five or six times, take notes, and transcribe them. This process of data immersion significantly facilitated the development of codes and themes in the subsequent stages of analysis. After completing the interviews, the researcher conducted observations in the classrooms where she taught English, utilizing the codes and themes derived from the interview data. As both a teacher and an observer, the researcher refrained from interrupting the language learning process or disrupting the natural classroom environment. For instance, she observed and took notes when a student reading in English displayed physiological symptoms of foreign language anxiety, such as stuttering or blushing. All aspects and phases of the observation process were meticulously documented in the observation notes. The data collected were integrated with the information gathered from students and teachers, categorized under relevant

themes, and the situation of foreign language anxiety was analyzed in depth. The researcher organized all the data under common themes, addressing similarities and differences to answer the research questions.

2.5. Reliability and Validity

Creswell (2009) identifies eight validity strategies for verifying qualitative research findings and recommends that researchers apply at least two strategies to enhance their studies' trustworthiness and reliability. These strategies include triangulation, member checking, rich and thick description, addressing researcher bias, considering negative or discrepant information, spending *prolonged time in the field*, engaging in peer debriefing, and utilizing external auditors. Among these, the most effective way to ensure trustworthiness in qualitative studies is through prolonged time in the field. Continuous presence in the same environment fosters a positive, trusting relationship, ensuring accurate and comprehensive responses during the data collection phase (Streubert & Carpenter, 2011). In this context, the researcher's decision to conduct the study at the secondary school where she has worked for six years—where she possesses extensive knowledge of the school culture and the study group—along with her sustained presence in the field throughout all phases of the research, significantly enhances the study's reliability.

The researcher took notes and summarized key points during the interviews to facilitate a clearer and more efficient interview process, ensuring the discussion remained focused on the research topic. To conduct *member checking*, the researcher shared the participants' responses in summarized form both during and after the interview. This approach aimed to prevent misinterpretation and misunderstanding, thereby enhancing the validity and reliability of the study. Erlandson et al. (1993) note that member checking can be implemented in various ways. For instance, it can involve sharing the interview report with the participant after the interview or summarizing the data collected by the researcher and inviting participants to provide feedback on its accuracy.

Furthermore, the fact that interviews were conducted with both students and teachers, and that the data obtained from these interviews were synthesized with one another and with the observation notes presented directly to the reader, demonstrates that the research offers multiple perspectives and significantly contributes to its overall consistency. The researcher's use of both interviews and observations, along with the inclusion of diverse study groups, exemplifies the *triangulation* strategy. Triangulation involves the researcher's efforts to enhance the diversity of data collected during the research process and to incorporate as many different perspectives as possible (Merriam, 1998). According to Mays and Pope (2000), triangulation refers to the comparison of results from two or more data collection methods (e.g., interviews and observations) or, more simply, from two or more data sources (e.g., interviews with members of different interest groups). This approach allows the weaknesses of one method to be offset by the strengths of another (Streubert & Carpenter, 2011). Consequently, the researcher aimed to enhance the credibility of the study and minimize bias in the findings by utilizing multiple data sources through both observations and interviews with various study groups.

In descriptive content analysis, direct quotations are employed to effectively convey the perspectives of the individuals interviewed and observed. Consequently, direct quotations were frequently incorporated to ensure an accurate representation of the data obtained from the content analysis (Özdemir, 2010). In this approach, the researcher aimed to enhance the reliability and validity of the study by presenting quotations related to the identified themes exactly as they were stated. Additionally, all notes and voice recordings collected were preserved throughout the study and beyond to ensure the confirmability of the interview and observation data. The statements of both students and teachers, along with the researcher's observation notes, were included in the findings as unaltered direct quotations to maintain credibility. When presenting these direct quotations in the findings, the researcher utilized the codes T1 for teachers and S1 for students.

2.6. Research Ethics

First, ethical approval was obtained from the Marmara University Institute of Educational Sciences Research and Publication Ethics Committee. Subsequently, a Survey and Research Permission Document was acquired from the Istanbul Provincial Directorate of National Education to conduct interviews and observations at the school. The study was carried out meticulously within the framework of ethical guidelines. Before initiating the research, the researcher met with her colleagues to inform them about the study's content and to ascertain their willingness to participate voluntarily. She requested that her colleagues identify students they had observed who exhibited foreign language anxiety, as well as those who did not, in their classes. The study group was formed based on the list provided by the teachers, ensuring a balanced representation of students' genders, grade levels, and academic achievements. The researcher obtained parents' contact information from the class teachers and individually informed both parents and students about the study's content and purpose, confirming their willingness to participate. A parent permission form was distributed to the students who volunteered, and the interview process commenced. Prior to the interviews, students were reminded that participation was voluntary, and this was reiterated to ensure clarity. The interviews were conducted entirely during the students' and teachers' free time, with careful attention given to ensuring that no grievances arose in their classes.

3. Results

3.1. What Is the Level of Anxiety Perceived by Secondary School Students?

The interview process commenced with inquiries about students' feelings regarding their English lessons. This approach aimed to foster a comfortable environment and to gain a deeper understanding of their experiences with the subject. It was found that all students believed that learning English as a foreign language is both necessary and important for various reasons. The responses were categorized into four key areas: a) necessity in social life, b) advantages in career choices, c) the global significance of the English language, and d) educational objectives. However, the data collected from the participants indicate that students experience foreign language anxiety during English lessons. Participants T6 and T13 articulated this issue as follows:

T6 "Generally speaking, yes, I think they are anxious. They have fears because they are using a different language."

T13 "Yes, I believe that they are generally anxious."

The fact that both students recognize the necessity of learning English while simultaneously experiencing varying levels of anxiety underscores the importance of understanding foreign language anxiety and defining the associated processes. To assess this, the students were asked to evaluate their perceived anxiety by responding to the question, "If you were to rate your level of anxiety, what would it be? (1 - I have no anxiety at all, 2 - I am rarely anxious, 3 - I am quite anxious, 4 - I am very anxious)" during the interview process. As a result, it was found that the students exhibited a range of anxiety levels, with the exception of five students who reported experiencing no anxiety whatsoever.

S33 "I forget or don't know the meaning of a word, the entire sentence disappears, and I start to feel a bit anxious. I rarely experience anxiety; I don't feel anxious in my other lessons."

S1 "English is not my native language; I often feel quite anxious in English class, so my level of anxiety is moderate."

S32 "[My anxiety level is] 4. I experience a significant amount of anxiety, particularly in English class. In my other classes, I can manage my anxiety when I put in the effort, but I struggle to do so in English, which is why it feels more overwhelming."

In addition to these students, S5, S13, and S22, who reported experiencing no anxiety in English classes, also indicated that they felt no anxiety in other lessons. S5, who specifically stated that he was not anxious in English class, expressed his/her feelings as follows:

S5 "I never feel anxious. I have always liked English; I have never worried about it. I don't worry about my other lessons either."

To determine whether students' anxiety was a general state or specific to the English course, they were asked if they experienced similar anxiety in other lessons. The students' responses indicated that they felt most anxious in Mathematics and English. While they attributed their anxiety in Mathematics to its difficulty, they struggled to articulate the reasons for their foreign language anxiety in English. This finding suggests that foreign language anxiety is a more complex construct. Furthermore, the fact that all students exhibited varying levels of anxiety, despite expressing enjoyment of English lessons and considering them fun, highlights how foreign language anxiety differs from other types of anxiety.

To gain a deeper understanding of the foreign language anxiety experienced by students, secondary school students in the 6th, 7th, and 8th grades were investigated regarding any changes in their anxiety levels compared to previous academic years. Additionally, teachers were consulted based on their professional experiences to identify the grade levels where they believed foreign language anxiety was most pronounced among students. The findings indicate a correlation between the data provided by students and teachers regarding this issue. While students reported feeling more anxious in the 5th grade, teachers concurred that foreign language anxiety was most prevalent in that same grade.

S18 "Last year [in 5th grade] I felt more anxious because I didn't know any of my friends or teachers, and I had gaps in my knowledge from primary school."

T9 "I can say that the 5th grade is the most anxiety-inducing year, as students have just transitioned from primary school. The adjustment to secondary school can be particularly challenging, especially for those who may feel less prepared than their peers. Consequently, they often experience this state of anxiety more acutely."

3.2. What Are the Symptoms of Foreign Language Anxiety?

The students were asked to describe the symptoms of foreign language anxiety they experienced, while the teachers were requested to report on the behavioral changes they observed in students whom they believed exhibited signs of foreign language anxiety. The study aimed to identify the symptoms associated with foreign language anxiety in students. The findings revealed that foreign language anxiety manifests through physiological, affective, and cognitive symptoms. Furthermore, it was concluded that students frequently experience multiple symptoms simultaneously. While the students reported experiencing *physiological symptoms* of foreign language anxiety, such as trembling hands, a flushed face, freezing, sweating, rapid heartbeat, and stuttering, the teachers identified similar symptoms, including a flushed face, unresponsiveness (freezing), avoidance of eye contact, stuttering, and a trembling voice.

S16 "... We were taking an oral exam. I hadn't studied much, and my turn was approaching. At that moment, I became extremely stressed and anxious. My face began to flush, I started to sweat, and I felt pain in my stomach and head."

S28 "I freeze, stutter, and my hands shake as I start to fidget. Sometimes, I bite my lips. I feel like crying, but I restrain myself. I experience intense embarrassment because the more I struggle to express myself, the worse I feel."

T3 "They appear anxious when I pose questions, often remaining unresponsive, failing to answer, or not raising their hands at all. I can sense their anxiety during lessons, as they become overly excited, and their voices tremble."

In her observation notes dated February 27, 2023, the researcher documented her observations about the physiological symptoms of foreign language anxiety as follows: "While reading the English text, the student struggles to read fluently, frequently taking intermittent breaths and swallowing, which clearly indicates his anxiety." In another observation note from March 9, 2023, she recorded, "The student blushed significantly while performing a dialogue on the board and requested permission to go to the restroom after the reading was completed. I also observed that the same student's voice trembled during a reading activity in a different lesson." To determine whether these behaviors were linked to the student's personality or foreign language anxiety, the researcher engaged the student in conversation in his native language about everyday topics. She noted that the student was able to express himself fluently, confirming that the issue was indeed related to foreign language anxiety. Consistent with the

findings reported by the teachers, the researcher also observed that the students read intermittently, stammered, and blushed.

Another symptom of foreign language anxiety is *affective symptoms*. Students describe these affective symptoms as feelings of anxiety, sadness, nervousness, embarrassment, and fear. Some students may not experience physiological symptoms but may only exhibit affective symptoms. Although teachers report difficulty in identifying these affective symptoms in their students, they do observe that students appear anxious, tense, and hesitant.

S17 "I can't control my reaction and start crying. This happened once last year when I was in fifth grade during an exam. I was very worried because I had forgotten some words, and I began to cry. I immediately tried to compose myself without the teacher noticing."

S26 "Although there is no physical change in me, I sometimes feel anxious, overwhelmed, and fatigued. At times, I experience a peculiar sensation that makes it difficult to hold back tears."

T13 "I understand that they hesitate to raise their hands. Even though I assure them that there will be no negative consequences for making a mistake, they still feel uneasy."

There are also *cognitive symptoms* associated with foreign language anxiety in the language learning process. Students have reported experiencing cognitive symptoms of foreign language anxiety, such as feelings of inadequacy, forgetfulness, and a lack of motivation. The cognitive symptoms that teachers can observe include reduced motivation and forgetfulness.

S24 "I feel inadequate; my English is poor. When I become anxious, I often feel inferior to others. It's a strange and unpleasant feeling."

T7 "When an individual becomes anxious, they tend to avert their eyes and avoid making eye contact. For instance, when they look at my face, it appears as though they have forgotten what they intended to say, and they often express this by saying, 'I forgot what I was going to say.'"

S1 "For example, sometimes I feel anxious while constructing a sentence, and I forget the words. Naturally, I dislike it when this happens."

One of the key findings to emphasize is the data from students who reported never experiencing foreign language anxiety. Interestingly, these students indicated that they sometimes felt anxious or frozen but managed to cope with their anxiety. This suggests that even students who claim that they never experience foreign language anxiety may exhibit signs of foreign language anxiety in specific contexts and may experience anxiety without being fully aware of it.

S34 "I mean, there is no change because I am not anxious. However, I sometimes freeze when I encounter something unfamiliar."

Recognizing the symptoms experienced by students in the learning environment and observed by teachers is crucial for identifying those who suffer from foreign language anxiety in English classes. This anxiety can significantly hinder the language learning process for affected students. Understanding the symptoms of foreign language anxiety is the first step toward managing it. With this awareness, educators can work to eliminate the situations that trigger such anxiety.

3.3. What Are the Causes of Foreign Language Anxiety?

The primary elements essential for effective learning are the classroom, the student, and the teacher. Meaningful learning takes place within the social environments created by these components. Disruptions arising from these elements can impede learning and result in negative experiences, such as foreign language anxiety. Research involving students and teachers has identified three sources of foreign language anxiety: the students themselves, the teachers, and the teaching system. Table 3 details situations that contribute to foreign language anxiety, organized by subheadings.

Student-Related Situations

Peer attitudes. Since negative peer attitudes encompass a wide range of behaviors, they were assessed through various sub-dimensions based on the participants' responses. For instance, the findings indicate that negative peer behaviors, such as laughing, giggling, and teasing, contribute to student-related causes of foreign language anxiety.

S7 "I went to the board with one of my friends, but I didn't know how to pronounce most of the words. Every time I mispronounced a word, the teacher corrected me, and I could hear giggles coming from the back rows, with many students laughing. This was my most anxious moment. The sound of my friends laughing was what worried me the most."

T2 "Peer pressure is a significant factor contributing to anxiety, particularly because children often lack empathy. This can lead to negative effects on their behavior. Even when they smile sarcastically, it may discourage them from participating, despite their initial willingness to engage."

Table 3. Situations that cause foreign language anxiety

Student-Related Situations	Teacher-Related Situations	Teaching System-Related Situations
Peer attitudes	Teacher attitude	Curriculum
Speaking activities	Teacher competencies	Exam-oriented education system
Listening activities	Feedback and correction	Distance education
Pronunciation	Teacher changes	Class size
Fear of making a mistake		Grammar-based teaching
Perfectionism		Textbooks
Lack of information		
Personality trait		
Prejudices		
Family attitudes		
Adolescence		
Economic conditions		

The researcher documented this situation in her observation notes dated March 16, 2023: "A student was newly enrolled in the class due to a change of city. I waited for her to acclimate to the class and the school for a while. However, after about a month and a half, I noticed she remained quiet during class. During an activity, I asked her why she never participated. The student explained that she wanted to engage but felt scared; her friends at her previous school often made fun of her, laughing at every incorrect answer, and she did not want to experience that again." Although he/she has not encountered such behavior in his/her current class and it has been quite some time since they faced such treatment, this situation strikingly explains how the negative peer attitudes to which the student was exposed adversely affected his/her language learning process and caused foreign language anxiety. In addition to encountering negative peer attitudes, such as laughter and ridicule, students frequently experience anxiety as they compare themselves to their classmates.

S23 "I mean, what worries me the most is the reaction of my classmates, especially when I make a mistake. My friends in class are very capable; they actively participate and achieve success. I often compare my abilities to theirs and question whether I am falling behind. If they can do it, why can't I?"

T5 "Five of my students experience foreign language anxiety because they compare themselves to their peers and feel that they are falling behind."

One of the primary objectives of this research is to identify the factors causing foreign language anxiety among secondary school students and to determine the sources of this anxiety. To achieve this goal and enhance the significance of the findings, students were asked to identify which of the four fundamental language skills (speaking, reading, writing, and listening) caused them the most anxiety and the reasons behind this anxiety. The results indicate that students predominantly experience foreign language anxiety in speaking, listening, and reading skills. According to teachers, students primarily encounter foreign language anxiety in speaking and listening skills.

Speaking activities. The findings gathered from the participants indicate that students experience anxiety during speaking activities. The researcher's observational notes confirm that foreign language anxiety is prevalent in these contexts. In her observation note dated March 28, 2023, the researcher articulated this situation: "It is a lesson in which we are engaged in a speaking activity, and the class is once again very quiet. As in every speaking activity, everyone sinks into a deep silence, as if they are reluctant for me to ask them a question." This silence during speaking activities and the decline in participation clearly demonstrate that students feel anxious in these situations.

It is evident that numerous factors cause students' anxiety during speaking activities. In this context, during the interview, students who reported experiencing foreign language anxiety in speaking tasks were asked to explain the reasons behind their heightened anxiety. One significant factor identified was the pressure associated with *oral performance and communication in the classroom*. Students believe they must excel in these areas to effectively comprehend questions and provide immediate responses, which ultimately leads to increased foreign language anxiety.

S23 "I get anxious about speaking activities because I have to provide an answer immediately. I often spend two hours trying to organize my thoughts in my mind, and everything becomes tangled."

T3 "They are very clearly anxious about speaking. It is understandably challenging for them to express themselves, as they need to produce a coherent message. Additionally, they face the pressure to respond quickly while speaking. They may need to employ multiple skills simultaneously to communicate effectively."

In addition, the belief among students that they lack competence in vocabulary and grammar causes anxiety during speaking activities. In other words, the participants reported experiencing foreign language anxiety because of their *difficulties in constructing sentences*.

S32 "I feel anxious when speaking because I try to formulate sentences on my own. I cannot prepare myself in the moment, as I do not know what the other person will say. I have to respond immediately, which causes me to panic."

T7 "The students are anxious when it comes to speaking. They struggle to express themselves because the English taught in schools is essentially the same as what we learned in primary school: simple sentences like 'Ali holds the ball' and 'Ali looks at the horse.' We are unable to teach children the underlying logic of the language, which causes their anxiety. The structure of our language and the logic behind constructing sentences differ significantly from English."

Listening activities. In addition to speaking activities, listening activities can also induce foreign language anxiety. A primary source of this anxiety among students during listening tasks is their difficulty in comprehending audio materials. One significant factor causing the incomprehensibility and anxiety associated with listening activities is the *speed* at which the listening texts are presented.

T11 "... Some of the listening materials are too fast for the students' proficiency level. When they struggle to understand, they become reluctant to listen, which increases their anxiety. In other words, listening exercises can induce anxiety in students."

S29 "I feel anxious while listening because I cannot understand. Sometimes, I misunderstand many things because they speak too quickly. When that happens, I feel anxious."

This situation regarding the listening texts is one of the elements observed by the researcher. According to the researcher's observation notes dated March 22, 2023: "We were conducting an activity in which students had to fill in the blanks of a short dialogue lasting approximately 35 seconds. I played the listening text, and at the very first blank, I was met with a unified reaction from the students: 'Oh, teacher, we don't understand; it's too fast. Can't we slow it down?' We listened several times and encouraged them to write down what they could comprehend, but I could not elicit the same level of participation as in previous activities, and their motivation had already waned. Additionally, the students appeared more anxious about their answers because they were uncertain about what they had written compared to other activities." Another source of anxiety for students during listening activities is the *variation in accents* found in the listening texts.

S21 "I feel anxious during listening activities because I have difficulty understanding words due to the accent..."

T8 "Students experience anxiety while listening due to variations in accents present in some of the listening texts. For example, when speakers use a rounded pronunciation, children may struggle to understand, leading to missed information. When this occurs, their anxiety tends to escalate."

According to the researcher's observation notes dated May 4, 2023: "We were conducting one of the listening activities from the textbook, where the students had to fill in the blanks in the dialogue. After listening twice, I asked them if they wanted to hear it again. One of my students, who typically

makes an effort to participate in every activity, said, 'Teacher, I don't understand anything; their accents sound very confusing.' It was evident from the student's attitude and tone of voice that he had completely lost his motivation for the lesson." Although the researcher noted that the student was attempting to engage, he also recognized that the student felt helpless due to his inability to comprehend the listening texts. This situation led the student to develop a negative perception of his capabilities regarding listening tasks and to experience foreign language anxiety.

Pronunciation. The findings revealed that participants reported experiencing foreign language anxiety, particularly concerning their speaking and reading skills. This anxiety stemmed from *their lack of knowledge about word pronunciation, the perceived difficulty of the words, and their inability to articulate them correctly.*

T1 "The reason they feel anxious about English is related to pronunciation; they worry about mispronouncing words. While they can express themselves more easily in subjects like Turkish and Social Studies, where they feel comfortable raising their hands, they experience foreign language anxiety in English concerning how to read and pronounce words, even when they know the correct pronunciation."

S20 "In speaking activities, I often worry that I will say the wrong word. At times, I also feel anxious about reading; I fear that I will mispronounce the words. Since the pronunciation of certain words varies, I frequently pronounce them incorrectly, which adds to my anxiety."

Fear of making mistakes. According to the participants, another student-related cause of foreign language anxiety is the fear of making mistakes. This fear can hinder individuals, diminish their abilities, and lead them to avoid various activities. Since language learning is a communication-based endeavor that requires active participation, students should not succumb to such fears. However, during this process, students often perceive making mistakes as detrimental, which intensifies their anxiety. This fear of making mistakes is not only experienced by the students but is also observed by their teachers.

S3 "I am afraid of making mistakes. For example, the teacher plays word games that are very enjoyable, but I refrain from participating in them for fear of making errors."

T13 "Foreign language anxiety intensifies primarily due to his fear of making mistakes. Although he is willing to try and possesses the knowledge, he refrains from raising his hand and participating in class. This reluctance to speak and engage in lessons adversely impacts his anxiety levels."

The researcher also observed that the students were apprehensive about making mistakes because they felt unable to express themselves adequately in the target language. According to the researcher's observation notes dated October 4, 2023: "We were conducting an activity in which students acted out the dialogues they had written at a basic level on the board. After allowing everyone a specific amount of time to write and rehearse their dialogues, they took turns performing them. When it was the turn of one of my male students, he expressed reluctance to read his dialogue. I approached him and asked why. The student replied, 'I do not know if it is right.' After reviewing what he had written and correcting a few minor errors (such as omitting the suffix -ing in a sentence), I reassured him that it was acceptable to make mistakes; the important thing was that he participated in the lesson. However, the student insisted that he did not want to make a mistake and was unwilling to go to the board to read the dialogue with his friend at their desk."

Students often fear making mistakes. To understand this fear better, they were asked to identify the situations that triggered it. The students reported that key factors contributing to their fear include the possibility of losing the teacher's favor and the risk of being humiliated in front of their peers.

S16 "I am afraid of making a mistake. Because I believe that if I make a mistake, my teacher's perception of me will change."

S23 "I fear making mistakes because I tell my teacher I cannot do it when I struggle. Admitting this makes me feel humiliated in front of my friends."

Perfectionism. Foreign language learning encompasses both conscious knowledge and exposure to the target language. Many students overlook this process and aspire to perform at an advanced level,

even when they are still in the initial stages of language acquisition. Consequently, any challenge they face can disrupt their learning and lead to foreign language anxiety. In other words, the findings from the participants indicate that *students' beliefs about their ability to express themselves flawlessly in a foreign language* cause their foreign language anxiety.

T2 "That they must be perfect leads to anxiety. However, if they acknowledge that perfection is unattainable, they can overcome this anxiety. Unfortunately, this realization often eludes them. While they strive for perfection, they tend to withdraw at the first sign of a mistake."

S14 "I don't want to make mistakes in my English lessons. I always strive to do everything correctly and properly. Therefore, I feel disheartened when I make errors, and I often feel embarrassed in class."

Lack of knowledge. Teachers believe that one of the primary causes of foreign language anxiety is a lack of knowledge, which makes students anxious about what they do not understand. This deficiency in knowledge during English lessons is particularly associated with distance education and is thought to arise from inadequate foundational learning in primary school.

T5 "This foreign language anxiety primarily stems from a lack of knowledge. If there are deficiencies in a student's education from primary school, they may begin secondary school with increased levels of anxiety."

S24 "I feel anxious due to my lack of knowledge. In primary school, we had a teacher who would write on the board and then erase it immediately. I struggled to understand anything during that time. When I reached secondary school, I felt like I was beginning to learn English. I had many gaps in my understanding, and then the pandemic occurred, preventing me from addressing those gaps. As a result, I now face even greater difficulties and anxiety."

Personality trait. The participants indicated that personality traits are crucial in foreign language learning. They noted that students with *timid and shy personalities* tend to experience higher levels of anxiety during the learning process. In contrast, those with high self-confidence are less affected by anxiety.

S23 "... I cannot overcome my shyness in English, which makes me more anxious."

S30 "I think someone who is sociable and likes to talk will learn English more easily, I am hesitant. I am shy, so I worry more."

T4 "The character of a child is very important... If they are shy or not very extroverted, I do not observe much desire in them to participate and engage. They tend to prefer remaining in a passive, observational mode."

Prejudices. The beliefs that learners develop about what they will learn, which form the foundation of the learning process, play a crucial role in the quality of that learning. In this context, the source of foreign language anxiety stems from students' perceptions of themselves and their language learning abilities. According to both students and teachers, these personal perceptions are often rooted in prejudices and fears.

S31 "Sometimes, I struggle to complete tasks due to my own prejudices. I find myself unable to answer even the simplest questions because I doubt my abilities. Since I have never succeeded in answering them before, I believe I cannot do so now."

T10 "Students... have prejudices. For instance, I have a student who consistently responds, 'Teacher, I don't know; don't ask me' during every lesson. He is consistently resistant in this manner. Additionally, some students come to class with the assumption that their peers already know the subject. However, everyone has the opportunity to learn during the lesson. If they were less biased, they would be able to grasp the subject matter; unfortunately, their prejudices hinder them, and they often lack the courage to take that first step."

Family attitudes. While students indicated that family attitudes contributed to pressure and increased their foreign language anxiety, teachers stated that *oppressive or authoritarian family dynamics, as well as competition among peers*, played a significant role in exacerbating students' foreign language anxiety.

T7 "Family attitude is very important in anxiety. When a family respects a child's preferences, choices, and decisions throughout their development, the child is more likely to express themselves freely. Although none of them may articulate their thoughts perfectly in English, they feel comfortable communicating. For instance, when I explain my problem and the teacher understands me, I feel reassured. I can make mistakes; I also make errors when speaking Turkish, and the child rightly understands that there is nothing wrong with that. However, if the family is oppressive, the situation becomes quite the opposite: the child experiences increased anxiety and worry in situations where they need to express themselves."

S31 "The family also has an impact on anxiety. For example, if I receive a low score or something similar, they immediately respond with, 'No phone, no this, no that during summer vacation,' as a form of punishment. This reaction only increases my anxiety."

S8 "My parents always want me to be the best, so I am so afraid of making mistakes that I constantly wonder if they will be upset or angry if I do something wrong. I worry a lot because of my parents."

According to the researcher's observation notes dated February 28, 2023: "I administered a vocabulary quiz to my fifth-grade students after the unit, which focused on the unit's words. Afterward, I asked the students to both repeat the words and evaluate their own quizzes. I noticed that one of my students, who had made several mistakes, appeared very distressed, with tears in his eyes. When I asked him what happened, he replied, 'Teacher, I made so many mistakes. Will you send the results to the parent WhatsApp group? My parents get angry with me even when I score below 95 on an exam.'" The fact that parents assess their children based on their scores, often setting an unreasonably high standard, causes foreign language anxiety in the student. Furthermore, considering the students' concern about their parents' anger and reactions, it is evident that harsh parental attitudes exacerbate the students' experience of foreign language anxiety.

Adolescence. It is evident that students undergo rapid physical, emotional, cognitive, and social changes during adolescence. They place greater importance on their circle of friends, and the opinions of their peers become extremely significant during this period. These factors contribute to various challenges in education. As noted by English teachers, one such challenge is that adolescence and its accompanying changes can lead to foreign language anxiety.

T1 "I think anxiety is also linked to puberty. For instance, the voice changes experienced by male students and the tendency of female students to conceal their features may contribute to this anxiety."

T13 "As children grow older and enter puberty, their anxiety often increases. Sometimes, I sense that a student may be reluctant to read aloud because they feel uncomfortable with their own voice. I observe that their anxiety heightens when they experience psychological discomfort related to the changes in their voice during adolescence."

Economic conditions. The final student-related factor causing foreign language anxiety is economic conditions. Teachers believe that *economic circumstances and unequal opportunities* are significant reasons for students' foreign language anxiety.

T4 "Economic conditions can cause anxiety. For instance, I have observed that students who participate in private lessons or courses outside of school—particularly those aimed at improving English-speaking skills—exhibit a significantly higher level of readiness. Even if their classroom education is insufficient, these students take proactive steps to enhance their English proficiency without losing motivation. Their enthusiasm remains consistent or may even continue to grow. Conversely, if a student's economic situation is inadequate and language learning is restricted to the school curriculum, English becomes indistinguishable from any other subject. As a result, the child may experience increased anxiety regarding the lesson."

Teacher-related Situations

Teacher attitude. The participants believe that *the teacher's harsh and oppressive attitude* is one of the main factors that cause foreign language anxiety. In this context, the findings gathered from both teachers and students support one another.

T9 "Teacher attitudes significantly affect student anxiety. If a teacher is harsh, their approach to students can also be severe, which may hinder their ability to establish effective communication with

children, often without realizing it. As a result, students may perceive the teacher as being angry with them. In such situations, I believe the teacher's attitude is both important and critical."

S28 "The reaction of my teachers concerns me. For instance, during a weekend course, I mispronounced a word in a sentence, and the teacher remarked, 'Can you really not remember something so simple?' in front of the entire class. This made me feel very uncomfortable, and I never returned to that teacher's class again. When similar incidents occurred two or three more times, I decided to stop attending the course altogether."

Feedback and correction. Feedback is an indispensable component of the teaching and learning process, and the way it is delivered is just as important as the feedback itself. The findings pertain to how students respond to and evaluate both the feedback they receive and the shortcomings of the feedback process. Students expressed discomfort with their *teachers' immediate and ongoing feedback and corrections*, noting that these interventions made the learning experience more exhausting and heightened their anxiety while attempting to articulate their thoughts. One student, S5, who claimed to never feel anxious during English lessons, highlighted that receiving instant and continuous feedback induced feelings of anxiety.

S5 "Sometimes, I mispronounce words while reading. The teacher corrects me immediately, which I find disruptive. I am constantly interrupted, and as a result, I stop, reread the passage, and become increasingly anxious. If she corrects me later, I feel less worried."

T10 "...Teachers provide immediate corrections; however, students may refrain from participating due to a fear of being subjected to instant feedback, which can lead to anxiety."

Teacher competencies. Students reported that their *teachers' lack of knowledge and ineffective teaching styles* caused varying levels of foreign language anxiety.

S29 "I believe that a teacher's knowledge is crucial. Our teacher is generally interested and tries to help but struggles to explain concepts clearly. Instead, they expect us to grasp the material solely from the tests. As a result, we find ourselves confused and do not study effectively from the textbook. Although my English skills are strong, my lack of understanding only increases my anxiety."

S22 "It also varies significantly depending on the teacher's instructional methods. For example, you may become disengaged if your teacher teaches the language through rote memorization. But it will be very different if your teacher incorporates games and activities that reinforce your speaking skills."

Classroom management is a significant factor causing foreign language anxiety among students. Many students have reported that excessive noise in the classroom hinders their ability to comprehend the lesson, which, in turn, exacerbates their foreign language anxiety.

S20 "I enjoy English; it is an important subject. However, I sometimes feel overwhelmed because there is a lot of talking in the classroom, which creates a noisy environment. As a result, I struggle to understand what is being said, and I feel anxious during those moments."

Change of English teacher. The findings show that *the frequent changes in English teachers* experienced by students throughout their education and training contribute to an increase in foreign language anxiety.

T2 "Students often become accustomed to a teacher's techniques and methods, forming an emotional bond with them. I place great importance on this bond, as it motivates students to engage actively in lessons. However, when a new teacher arrives, students must adjust to their different teaching style, which can be a time-consuming process. Each educator has a unique approach, and adapting to these variations can be challenging for both the child and the teacher. While change can sometimes be beneficial, frequent transitions are detrimental and can heighten students' anxiety regarding foreign language learning."

Teaching System-Related Situations

Curriculum. According to the findings obtained from the participants, the English curriculum is inadequate for students to develop the four fundamental language skills, particularly speaking and listening. Additionally, the curriculum's objectives cannot be effectively taught within the planned lesson

hours, especially given the large class sizes in state schools. *This discrepancy between the curriculum and the scheduled class hours* causes students to experience foreign language anxiety.

T3 "The curriculum and lesson hours conflict with one another. For instance, the class hours allocated for the 5th grade are insufficient. The minimum class size is already 30 students; if I allocate 5 minutes for each student to participate in a speaking activity, my entire weekly lesson is consumed by this single activity. Additionally, since not every student can speak at the same pace or respond simultaneously, I believe this affects both their success and anxiety levels."

The ineffectiveness of the curriculum; the fact that the subjects or activities in the curriculum are not useful for students in real life and do not facilitate their daily lives easier also cause foreign language anxiety.

T7 "Children don't consider English as a communication tool that will be useful in their daily life."

S17 "I experience anxiety when it comes to learning longer words—specifically, those whose meanings are difficult to infer and are not part of my daily vocabulary. Because I do not encounter these words in real life, I find it challenging to learn them, which, in turn, increases my anxiety."

The exam-oriented education system. Eighth-grade secondary school students take the centralized High School Transition System (LGS) exam, which consists of ten English questions. Additionally, students are required to complete four English exams at each grade level: two in standard English and two in Elective English. Many students have reported that both the LGS and the traditional exams, which are part of the assessment and evaluation process, increase their anxiety. Furthermore, even those students who claimed to have never experienced foreign language anxiety admitted to feeling anxious during traditional exams, particularly in open-ended questions.

S22 "I am not anxious at all; however, open-ended questions can be challenging. For instance, I was constructing a sentence in the future tense, and I am uncertain about where to incorporate words such as 'definitely' or similar terms."

S19 "I believe that the situations causing anxiety are exams, as they occur only once or twice and offer no opportunity for compensation, such as the LGS. Consequently, we, as students, experience heightened anxiety regarding our ability to succeed."

T4 "I have observed that students enjoy learning in grades 5 and 6, but often disengage from English in grades 7 and 8. For these students, the subject becomes merely another course to pass, reduced to the status of an exam. I believe that it transforms into an obligation. If the education system were not centered on exams, these children would continue to learn English in a more natural and engaging manner. However, the current system compels us to prioritize test preparation after a certain point, which ultimately leads to increased anxiety among students."

The impact of exam stress on foreign language anxiety, as reported by a seventh-grade student to the researcher, was documented in the researcher's observation notes dated November 4, 2023. The notes state: "After the first exams of the semester, while I was evaluating the students' exams in the classroom, I noticed that one of my typically engaged students received surprisingly low scores. I asked him why, assuming he had not studied for the exam. The student replied in a tearful voice, 'Teacher, I studied a lot, but during the exam, I forgot everything, so I couldn't answer anything.'" This situation illustrates that despite the student's enthusiasm for the lesson and active class participation, he was unable to respond to questions on the exam, which were relatively easier than the material covered in class. This indicates that the foreign language anxiety he experienced is a consequence of the exam-oriented education system.

Distance education. During the distance education process necessitated by the COVID-19 pandemic, students reported difficulties in following and comprehending lessons due to technical deficiencies, disruptions, and the inefficiency of live classes. Consequently, they experienced high anxiety in English lessons, which stemmed from their lack of foundational knowledge at the beginning of the semester and the challenges associated with individualized learning in pandemic conditions.

S5 "In distance education, my internet connection was constantly dropping, making it impossible for me to follow the lessons. Additionally, I struggled with the virtual environment, and my English skills regressed that semester, which was concerning to me."

S28 "My English was excellent in the 5th and 6th grades, but after the pandemic, I isolated myself. I rarely went out, and when school reopened, I began to feel uncomfortable and increasingly anxious."

T13 "This year's fifth graders present notable differences compared to previous cohorts. For example, when teaching them how to tell time, many students struggle with basic counting and do not even recognize numbers. Ideally, children should be able to count to at least 50 to tell time. Unfortunately, the pandemic and the transition to distance education in primary school hindered productive learning. Consequently, we are encountering students who are academically underprepared and exhibit higher levels of anxiety than the fifth graders I taught in previous years."

Class size. The students reported that the classes were excessively crowded, which hindered their ability to express themselves effectively. Consequently, large class sizes became a source of anxiety for them.

S10 "There are thirty-one students in our class, and I am increasingly concerned about the overcrowded environment. At times, it isn't even my turn to participate. If there were fewer students, the teachers might be able to manage the class more effectively. However, with so many students, everything becomes more challenging."

T12 "Classes are overcrowded, making it challenging to meet the diverse needs of all students. It is essential to maintain a manageable number of students in each class. For example, I assign simple exercises to help struggling students experience success. However, this strategy can bore high-achieving students and diminish their interest in the lesson. In smaller classes, both high-performing and struggling students, as well as anxious and non-anxious students, can receive more individualized attention. I believe this approach is more effective, as the current state of overcrowded classrooms often heightens anxiety among students."

Grammar-intensive teaching. Students reported experiencing anxiety due to the differences between English and Turkish grammar structures. Meanwhile, teachers observed that students tend to feel more anxious during periods when grammar topics are emphasized. Furthermore, the lack of development and implementation of alternative and contemporary methods, as opposed to traditional approaches in grammar instruction also causes foreign language anxiety.

T3 "In Turkey, grammar is a problem at a very early age. It is difficult to expect a child to grasp such concepts in English when they have not yet mastered the subjects, actions, and verbs in Turkish. This year, I had to teach adjectives and adverbs, but the child is not yet familiar with these concepts in Turkish. When grammar is involved, language learning ceases to be a pleasant and enjoyable experience for children and instead becomes a source of anxiety."

S16 "Now we have begun to go deeper, more into the details of the language. We need to know the vocabulary and use them in sentences with appropriate patterns [grammar rules] and have a dialog with the teacher. This process can be challenging, which makes me quite anxious this year."

Textbooks. Teachers consider *the content of English textbooks to be inadequate and incomplete*, believing that this increases students' foreign language anxiety.

T11 "I have observed that the eighth graders hate their textbooks. When this occurs, it is unreasonable to expect students to engage with the lessons. Additionally, the fifth-grade textbook is quite ineffective. Many activities are repetitive, and the content is lacking, particularly in the fifth grade. The exercises are confined to a narrow scope, offering little variety; the topics are limited, and the activities primarily consist of question-and-answer formats. This approach diminishes student motivation and heightens their anxiety."

English teachers believe that the textbooks are not only *visually unappealing and outdated but also unsuitable for students' proficiency levels*. The presence of vocabulary that exceeds students' comprehension and content that does not align with their social and cultural experiences causes foreign language anxiety among students.

T8 "It is obvious that the textbooks are highly ineffective, as the activities fail to sufficiently motivate the child. For instance, in speaking activities, the child struggles to find tasks that resonate with their own life, excite them, or engage them in the subject matter. Often, these activities involve looking at photographs (typically of poor quality and lacking realism) and stating, 'man is doing this now; this man is doing that now'. Child lacks the desire to speak, which I believe causes to increased anxiety."

T13 "I utilize supplementary materials alongside the national education textbooks to accommodate the varying readiness levels of my students. In crowded and heterogeneous classrooms, particularly

with my current fifth graders, it is often impractical to implement the activities outlined in the textbook, as they are significantly above the students' comprehension levels. The anxiety experienced by students arises from textbooks that are not aligned with their abilities and lack real-world relevance. Furthermore, the listening texts frequently do not match their proficiency levels."

3.4. What Are the Consequences of Foreign Language Anxiety?

The findings indicate that students experience foreign language anxiety at varying levels. Even those who claim not to feel any anxiety may still experience it in certain situations. According to the students, the consequences of foreign language anxiety on their language learning include failing English lessons, developing a sense of learned helplessness that hinders their ability to learn the language, making more mistakes due to their feelings of failure, and experiencing a negative impact on their in-class participation. Consistent with the teachers' experiences and observations, the results of foreign language anxiety are reflected in students' classroom performances, leading to failures in English lessons, feelings of learned helplessness, and reduced class participation.

Academic failure. Based on the teachers' statements, it can be concluded that high levels of foreign language anxiety cause academic failure. Furthermore, the findings from the participants indicate an inverse relationship between high foreign language anxiety and academic success. English teachers emphasize that students who experience significant anxiety often struggle to achieve success, despite their willingness to learn.

T10 "I can assert that excessive foreign language anxiety leads to student failure. While a certain level of anxiety can be beneficial, a completely anxiety-free student is not necessarily ideal. However, when anxiety exceeds this optimal level, the student may struggle to focus on the material in front of them; they may not even perceive the lesson. Even if the subject matter is straightforward and easily manageable, the student might think, 'Oh my God, I can't do this in English; it's so difficult.' This negative mindset can completely obstruct their perception, which ultimately hinders their success. It undoubtedly has a detrimental effect on their performance."

S16 "This is a significant issue, teacher, as it leads to negative consequences. For instance, during periods of intense anxiety, I consistently experienced a decline in my performance; my success diminished as my anxiety escalated. I believe other students face similar challenges as well."

In addition, one consequence of foreign language anxiety is that students reported *making more mistakes* during English lessons. For instance, a student experiencing foreign language anxiety may misread a word that he or she can normally read during a reading activity. This initial mistake can trigger further errors, resulting in an accumulation of mistakes.

S27 "When I feel anxious, I tend to forget what I know. If I make a mistake due to that anxiety, I then experience even more anxiety, which leads to additional mistakes."

Students often make attempts in the language learning process; however, these efforts frequently result in failure. This ongoing experience of failure can lead students to develop a belief that they are incapable of achieving success. This phenomenon is known as *learned helplessness*. In summary, both students and teachers recognize learned helplessness as a sub-dimension of failure that arises from foreign language anxiety, emphasizing it as one of the consequences of such anxiety.

S31 "As long as my anxiety persists, I don't believe I can achieve success or make any meaningful progress. I mean, I study English diligently every day, yet I still struggle to alleviate my anxiety. While I have made some improvements, they feel insufficient, which discourages me. I often feel as though I will always fail and never succeed."

S25 "... When you are unable to succeed consistently, you may stop trying, convinced that you cannot achieve your goals. This mindset results in poor performance and failure, as I have experienced."

T12 "The most significant consequence is that students come to believe they cannot succeed. Some genuinely feel that they are incapable of learning and speaking English. They often express their inability to do so, which ultimately hinders their foreign language acquisition. This mindset often stems from past failures, despite their willingness to learn. It resembles a state of learned helplessness."

In-class participation. According to the findings, as students' foreign language anxiety increases, their academic achievement and in-class participation decline. This anxiety causes students to struggle to articulate their thoughts, even when they are confident in their knowledge, leading to diminished participation. Teachers have also reported that anxious students often become withdrawn and silent, which further affects their engagement in class.

S12 "I used to experience extreme anxiety and fear; I couldn't even raise a finger due to my apprehension. I would immediately lower it without lifting it, insisting that I didn't want to participate in the lesson, even if the teacher noticed me. This behavior placed me in a challenging position in the eyes of the teacher, as I was unwilling to engage with the material I understood. I believe this was one of the most detrimental consequences of my anxiety."

T10 "For instance, we play a simple game during the lesson, such as hangman in English; however, he or she does not participate at all. I believe he or she wants to be involved in the lesson but seems to be afraid. Perhaps he or she is more talkative in other subjects, but in English, I notice that his or her participation diminishes due to anxiety and fear."

3.5. What Are the Ways of Coping with Foreign Language Anxiety?

According to the findings regarding how participants cope with foreign language anxiety, several methods employed by both teachers and students overlap. The participants utilize technological support, motivation, peer learning, vocabulary acquisition, teacher assistance, and preparation as ways of coping to manage their foreign language anxiety.

Technological support. In the school where the research was conducted, the availability of smart boards and internet access in every classroom greatly facilitates the use of technology. For this reason, teachers stated that it is a very effective method for addressing foreign language anxiety, and they benefit from incorporating technological applications into their English lessons as much as possible. The educational websites utilized by the teachers include *Okulistik*, *Morpha* (T3), *EBA* (T9), *smart board applications from textbooks*, and *YouTube* (T7). Additionally, many teachers reported that they find educational word games, such as *Quizlet and Cram* (T12) beneficial on these websites.

T2 "Technological tools, such as competitions and online quiz shows, are effective in alleviating anxiety. Therefore, I utilize various resources that are appropriate for the subject technologically. It can include slides, music, and games. I have observed that students who typically struggle to engage in lessons become more enthusiastic when we incorporate a game from the application. Even if they are unable to succeed, they still express a desire to participate. I believe that their enjoyment of these activities demonstrates a reduction in anxiety."

As noted by T2, teachers prefer technological opportunities because they are both engaging and educational. This approach helps to reduce instances of foreign language anxiety in the classroom. Students who utilized these technological resources reported improvements in their English skills and a decrease in foreign language anxiety through applications and educational websites such as *Duolingo* (S12), *Cambly* (S22), *Newsinlevels* (S34), *Quizlet* (S11), and *course videos from Tonguç Akademi* (S21).

S22 "Last year, I felt anxious during speaking activities, and I was even afraid of misreading while reading. However, I have completely overcome this fear. I used the Cambly app during my summer vacation, and it significantly helped me alleviate my anxiety. By the time I reached 7th grade, I no longer experienced any anxiety at all."

Peer learning. The significance of classroom interaction and peer relationships in foreign language learning has been emphasized in numerous studies. Research indicates that peers can influence the language acquisition process in both positive and negative ways. While negative peer attitudes cause foreign language anxiety, many teachers and students assert that *positive peer attitudes* and collaborative learning are crucial in alleviating this anxiety. The dual role of peers (as both contributors to anxiety and as a means of reducing it) highlights the importance of peer dynamics in the language learning process.

Observing the positive effects of peer learning on anxiety, teachers cope with foreign language anxiety by implementing classroom activities that create opportunities for peer collaboration. Similarly, students reported that they seek assistance from their peers to alleviate and manage their foreign

language anxiety. They learn from one another and engage in speaking activities together, which not only reinforces their understanding of the subject but also helps to reduce their anxiety.

T1 "I attach great importance to peer learning. Even the student sitting next to a learner experiencing anxiety plays a crucial role. Some children possess high social intelligence; they not only complete their own tasks but also assist their peers. I have observed that anxious students become more successful and motivated, and their anxiety diminishes through peer learning and support. To help reduce anxiety, I allow students to change seats during activities and emphasize pair work. Those students who I notice are positively impacted often ask if they can sit with their friends during these activities. I permit this because I know they will collaborate and learn together rather than simply socialize."

S11 "For example, I sometimes speak in simple English with my friend. This practice is enjoyable, reinforces the topics I wish to discuss, and helps alleviate my anxiety."

S27 "My best friend is quite proficient in English, and he frequently repeats words and sentences from the videos he watches. He sometimes speaks to me in English, and I find that I understand him well. His words resonate with me. Because he shares this experience with me regularly, it stays in my mind, and the more I comprehend, the less anxious I feel. I believe that friends play a crucial role in alleviating foreign language anxiety."

Vocabulary learning. Vocabulary learning, much like peer attitudes, both causes foreign language anxiety and serves as a way of coping to manage it. These findings indicate that if students understand the factors that lead to foreign language anxiety, actively address them, and improve their circumstances, they can effectively cope with this anxiety. Participants emphasize that vocabulary acquisition is crucial in foreign language learning and that an expanded vocabulary significantly aids in reducing foreign language anxiety.

S5 "Being proficient in English requires a strong vocabulary. The more words you learn, the more confident you will become, reducing any feelings of anxiety. I feel completely at ease now because I have expanded my vocabulary significantly, and I can express myself effectively."

T5 "I believe that vocabulary acquisition is crucial, as students often experience anxiety stemming from their limited vocabulary knowledge. This anxiety arises from a fear of the unknown. Therefore, the most significant step for them to develop a sense of understanding is to expand their vocabulary. I focus on enhancing vocabulary knowledge to alleviate this anxiety."

Motivation. It is a crucial factor in the learning process. A motivated student attends lessons regularly, listens attentively, and demonstrates consistency in their studies, all of which positively influence their learning outcomes. Recognizing the significance of motivation, teachers strive to inspire and encourage students as much as possible, assisting them in managing foreign language anxiety in the short term. Teachers provide positive reinforcement for all responses students offer during lessons, ensuring that they do not judge or make students feel as though they have made mistakes. This approach aims to empower students, helping them recognize their capabilities, overcome any negative biases they may hold, and enhance their motivation to learn. Similarly, students report that they manage their foreign language anxiety by using self-affirming language and maintaining positive thoughts when faced with challenges in language learning.

T1 "I try to motivate my students, even in their responses to the simplest questions. When I do this, they exert effort, even during challenging activities, and it yields positive results. This approach helps me cope with anxiety; I believe that allowing students the opportunity to express themselves and providing positive feedback for each of their answers—along with encouraging phrases such as, 'Oh great, you completed this! That's wonderful; you understood this!'—is highly effective. This is why motivating students is beneficial in the short term."

S17 "When I feel anxious, I initially experience a sense of unhappiness. However, I then strive to motivate and support myself by reminding myself that not knowing the answer to a single question does not reflect poorly on my English skills. This shift in perspective completely transforms my mood; I become happier, and my anxiety diminishes."

Teacher support. Teacher support encompasses instances in which educators provide guidance during English lessons. Students have reported receiving assistance from their teachers in managing their foreign language anxiety. Additionally, teachers indicate that they not only assist students but also help

them find ways to alleviate their foreign language anxiety. They try to cope with this anxiety by engaging in conversations with students about their anxiety and offering guidance either directly or through the school's counseling services.

S27 "I expect support from my teacher when I feel anxious. I strive to do my best in those moments, and my teacher typically offers assistance and guidance. For instance, when I struggle to begin a sentence due to my anxiety, he initiates the sentence, and I continue from there. His approach helps me feel more at ease."

T7 "I frequently engage in conversations with children. I recommend age-appropriate applications they can install, resources they can study, movies they can watch, singers they can listen to, and books they can read, ensuring they understand what they can do and how to do it. I believe that exposure to the language will help reduce anxiety, and I provide suggestions to my students in this regard. In other words, my primary approach to alleviating anxiety involves talking, guiding, and spending one-on-one time with students. I have observed that this strategy effectively reduces their anxiety in the short term."

Preliminary Preparation. Teachers have observed that students often experience heightened anxiety when they arrive at English lessons unprepared or when they are unexpectedly called upon to answer questions in English. To alleviate this anxiety, teachers encourage students to prepare in advance for their lessons. Additionally, students have reported that being well-prepared for class significantly reduces their foreign language anxiety, resulting in lower anxiety levels when they come to class ready to participate.

T9 "In speaking activities, particularly during exercises where I prompt students to express themselves, many students often experience anxiety. To alleviate this discomfort, I first encourage them to practice among themselves. Sometimes they practice individually, while at other times they collaborate with their classmates, which helps them feel more at ease due to their prior preparations. Occasionally, I assign a topic for them to research at home, informing them that we will engage in an activity related to it the following day, such as delivering a speech. Overall, to minimize anxiety, I ensure that they come to class well-prepared and have completed the necessary preparations in advance."

S10: "I study at home to alleviate my anxiety regarding our current topics and assignments. Being informed about what we will cover and preparing in advance significantly reduces my anxiety. When I attend class without having studied, I feel considerably more anxious; therefore, I prioritize studying for about an hour each day."

4. Discussion and Conclusion

Although this study aims to describe the foreign language anxiety experienced by secondary school students in all its dimensions, understanding their feelings about language learning and their perceived levels of foreign language anxiety provides valuable insights for this research. The results indicate that, while all students acknowledge the importance of foreign language learning in their social and educational lives, recognize its potential to enhance their career opportunities, and agree that English serves as a global language, they experience different levels of foreign language anxiety. Horwitz and Cope (1986), who conducted extensive research on the impact of foreign language anxiety on language acquisition, emphasized the significance of language learning across multiple fields. They concluded that individuals who understand this significance are more likely to experience foreign language anxiety. Therefore, it can be inferred that students experience anxiety for similar reasons. The key conclusion at this stage is that, although students recognize the necessity of foreign language learning, they simultaneously experience foreign language anxiety.

When analyzing the foreign language anxiety perceived by the students, it was found that only five students did not report any anxiety. However, the results from the interviews revealed that the students exhibited symptoms of foreign language anxiety, such as freezing and stuttering in certain situations, and that they had experienced foreign language anxiety in previous years. This indicates that all students in the study group, including those with and without current foreign language anxiety, had experienced it in some form. In summary, even the students selected for the study because they did not currently experience foreign language anxiety were found to have faced it in their past educational

experiences. It was concluded that nearly all students had experienced foreign language anxiety at various levels.

It is crucial to understand how students react when they feel anxious about language learning, as these reactions are the initial indicators of whether students are experiencing anxiety. In this study, these reactions are categorized into physiological, affective, and cognitive symptoms of foreign language anxiety. The results indicate that all participating students experienced at least one of these symptoms. Furthermore, it was concluded that some students do not exhibit physical symptoms of foreign language anxiety but only display affective or cognitive symptoms. The absence of physiological symptoms, coupled with the presence of only affective or cognitive symptoms, complicates the determination of whether students are experiencing foreign language anxiety and hinders the provision of effective support for coping with it. Therefore, teachers' awareness and knowledge of physiological, cognitive, and affective symptoms would assist them in identifying students who are experiencing foreign language anxiety. Additionally, this understanding could help diminish and cope with situations that trigger foreign language anxiety. For this reason, in order to cope with foreign language anxiety of students, it is recommended that all educators should first be encouraged and trained to identify the symptoms of foreign language anxiety and implement coping strategies for them.

Identifying the situations that induce anxiety in students and minimizing these triggers within the learning environment can enhance students' confidence and reduce their anxiety levels. These situations are the underlying causes of foreign language anxiety. In this study, the causes of foreign language anxiety were categorized into three dimensions: student, teacher, and teaching system. Peer attitudes emerged as one of the most significant factors affecting students. Negative criticism among students in the classroom, along with reactions such as laughing, giggling, and correcting one another during speaking activities, creates pressure and heightens anxiety. According to Tokur and Kaçire (2015), in language learning environments dominated by peer pressure, students' fears of negative reactions from their peers lead to anxiety and result in avoidance of participation. Students have reported feeling uneasy and anxious due to fears of mispronunciation, embarrassment, and negative reactions from others, with these feelings being most pronounced during speaking activities. Therefore, it is recommended that guidance services and English teachers in schools collaborate to eliminate peer pressure that adversely affects students' foreign language learning experiences.

In this study, students experienced the highest levels of foreign language anxiety during speaking tasks. The necessity to simultaneously employ various skills, such as vocabulary and grammar, during speaking activities contributes to this anxiety. Similarly, Borisova et al. (2024) found that students' anxiety increases when they are unable to select the appropriate words to express themselves or when they struggle to recall ideas while speaking in English. MacIntyre and Gardner (1991) also noted that speaking activities can exacerbate anxiety. However, in this study, students also reported experiencing foreign language anxiety during listening activities, in addition to speaking tasks. The results indicated that students' foreign language anxiety during listening activities is largely attributed to the speed and accent of the listening texts. According to Buck (2001), accent plays a crucial role in listening comprehension; when listeners encounter an unfamiliar accent, their comprehension process is disrupted, making it nearly impossible to grasp the content. Similarly, as speech speed increases, listeners do not have sufficient time to process grammatical structures and vocabulary, leading them to miss parts of the text and ultimately hindering full comprehension. These challenges contribute to students' anxiety and discourage them (Orakçı, 2018). For this reason, it is recommended to reorganize classroom activities and course materials and adapt them to the students' proficiency levels.

Peer attitudes, pronunciation, and the fear of making mistakes are closely interconnected. For instance, research has shown that one of the situations students fear most is mispronouncing words. They often believe that such errors will lead to ridicule or mockery from their peers. Consequently, students report making more mistakes in these situations. In a study, Gregersen (2003) concluded that anxious students are more prone to making errors. Therefore, it can be asserted that high levels of foreign language anxiety increase the likelihood of making mistakes during the language learning process. To

reduce foreign language anxiety, it may be recommended to conduct awareness-raising studies aimed at preventing students from creating threatening and mocking classroom environments, whether these behaviors stem from peers or teachers.

Students' personality traits and family attitudes are significant factors contributing to foreign language anxiety. The results indicate that when families exhibit oppressive, authoritarian, perfectionistic behaviors, or maintain excessive expectations, students are more likely to experience anxiety related to foreign language learning. Furthermore, these family attitudes can lead to grade anxiety, characterized by a fear of receiving low grades. This anxiety regarding poor academic performance is commonly referred to as test anxiety in literature. Yıldız (2007) revealed that parental attitudes play a crucial role in influencing test anxiety. Additionally, Chan and Wu (2004) found that students' foreign language anxiety increased under family pressure, while it decreased with family encouragement and support. The family plays a pivotal role in shaping both students' personalities and their anxiety levels. While openness and extroversion contribute to lower foreign language anxiety (Qin & Li, 2024), timid and shy students tend to experience heightened levels of foreign language anxiety in English classes. According to Tez (2017), shyness is the most significant variable affecting foreign language anxiety. Bjelica and Milanović (2022) also concluded that parental attitudes influence shyness. In summary, a healthy relationship between parents and children, along with a supportive parental attitude, positively affects students' personality development and can help alleviate one of the causes of foreign language anxiety. For this reason, educators and counseling services should be made aware of the significance of the relationship between parents and students. The impact of family attitudes on students' foreign language anxiety should be emphasized through training programs organized for parents as part of school-family collaboration. Parents should be encouraged to adopt a more constructive approach and provide support to students throughout the language acquisition process. Additionally, another notable result is the sub-dimension of perfectionist family attitudes. It is well-established that family attitudes contribute to foreign language anxiety; however, this study specifically identifies perfectionist family attitudes as a significant cause of such anxiety. Therefore, researchers are recommended to evaluate foreign language anxiety by incorporating the perspectives of parents to better describe out-of-school anxiety factors.

Feeling academically inadequate also causes foreign language anxiety. During the emergency distance education period of the pandemic, many students struggled to follow lessons due to factors such as lack of internet access, inadequate hardware, and the limited technological knowledge of their parents (Demir & Kale, 2020). These challenges resulted in knowledge gaps, which, in turn, led to anxiety when they transitioned to face-to-face education. Furthermore, research has shown that students who struggle with vocabulary acquisition and feel inadequate in this area develop negative personal beliefs, fears, and prejudices, all of which contribute to an increase in foreign language anxiety. Kocaman (2017) found that students experienced the most difficulty with vocabulary knowledge, which hindered their ability to derive sufficient benefit from lessons. Similarly, Songbatumis (2017) and Suryani et al. (2020) stated that inadequate vocabulary knowledge is the most significant obstacle students face in language learning and the most common problem they encounter when trying to improve their language skills. The difficulties that students experience in learning vocabulary, combined with their inability to benefit from distance education, lead to a lack of knowledge and feelings of inadequacy. This situation heightens students' anxiety in the classroom. Studies aimed at addressing students' knowledge gaps will help reduce their foreign language anxiety. For this reason, it is recommended that schools systematically implement practices to identify and eliminate students' knowledge deficiencies.

All the causes of student-related foreign language anxiety are interconnected and influence one another. For instance, many students, particularly those in adolescence, are reluctant to participate in activities due to the fear of negative peer judgments or the possibility of making mistakes. This apprehension heightens their anxiety, especially during speaking activities. These factors are interrelated and collectively contribute to foreign language anxiety, affecting various dimensions such as test anxiety, communication anxiety, and speaking anxiety. Duman et al. (2017) defined students' speaking anxiety as the fear of making mistakes, anxiety stemming from past negative experiences, fear of the classroom

environment, and a lack of self-confidence. In this context, it can be asserted that negative peer attitudes, the fear of making mistakes, and certain personality traits adversely affect speaking anxiety in the target language. Their findings align with the results of this study. Therefore, it is crucial to communicate to students that making mistakes is a natural part of the learning process and that they will not face judgment based on their errors from teachers or peers. (Kianinezhad, 2024). In summary, this research demonstrates that the factors contributing to student-related foreign language anxiety, as discussed in previous sections, are interrelated in multiple ways. These findings further confirm that foreign language anxiety possesses a complex structure.

While students' individual efforts are crucial in language learning, teachers play an equally important role. The impact of teachers on language learning can either mitigate or exacerbate foreign language anxiety, with certain teacher-related factors causing it. The results of the study reveal that harsh and judgmental teacher attitudes create and increase foreign language anxiety in students. Numerous studies have shown that teacher attitudes and behaviors create foreign language anxiety in students (Aydın & Zengin, 2008; Baş, 2014), particularly anxiety related to the fear of negative evaluation by their teachers (Duman et al., 2017), and teacher attitudes are directly linked to foreign language anxiety (Bekleyen, 2004). In addition, the study found that teachers who provide immediate and continuous corrective feedback could cause foreign language anxiety. Excessive feedback may overwhelm students (Gözütok, 2000), and negative feedback along with harsh, judgmental attitudes that consistently correct students' mistakes, can restrict communication and increase anxiety (Tokur, 2016). Therefore, it is crucial to acknowledge that such situations can induce foreign language anxiety in language learning environments, and efforts should be made to minimize these occurrences to alleviate anxiety. For instance, Zhao (2024) contends that feedback should be delivered indirectly to reduce students' anxiety during the feedback process.

In addition to teacher attitudes, a lack of effective classroom management skills, along with insufficient knowledge, skills, and qualifications, can contribute to foreign language anxiety among students. For instance, students have reported feeling more anxious when they do not understand lessons delivered by teachers who struggle with classroom management. Anşın (2006) emphasized that teachers should approach classroom management with a strong pedagogical focus, highlighting that positive student-teacher relationships enhance foreign language learning. Anşın also noted that teachers should avoid fostering a competitive atmosphere in the classroom. According to Anşın (2006), a teacher's ability to maintain control and authority in the classroom leads to positive outcomes for language learning. In summary, it is crucial to understand the situations in which teachers inadvertently induce anxiety to ensure the successful implementation of the language learning process. By identifying these factors, measures can be taken to address and mitigate foreign language anxiety. For instance, educators are encouraged to foster a supportive and constructive student-teacher relationship. Additionally, they should continually enhance their teaching techniques by incorporating contemporary methods. Given that students have reported that game-based and activity-oriented teaching significantly alleviates foreign language anxiety, such activities should be integrated more frequently into the language learning process. Chan et al. (2024) discussed the significance of game-based learning and endorsed the recommendations presented in this study. They noted that, since foreign language acquisition can be a considerable challenge for students learning a second language, educational practitioners should consider developing play-based English curricula. Such curricula could help alleviate the learning anxiety that children experience during English lessons and enhance their language skills.

Students, teachers, and the teaching system are the three primary elements that complement one another and ensure the success of the foreign language learning process. The study concluded that certain deficiencies or inadequacies in the teaching system cause foreign language anxiety. One significant issue is that the weekly course hours specified in the curriculum are insufficient to meet its objectives. This inadequacy hinders the balanced emphasis on the four fundamental skills in language learning, thereby increasing foreign language anxiety. Additionally, the curriculum's lack of functionality and its irrelevance to students' real-life needs render the lessons abstract and difficult to comprehend,

further increasing anxiety. Similarly, Tunç (2021) emphasized that the activities conducted by teachers were not suitable for the students' age and learning characteristics. She also highlighted that the activities recommended in the curriculum were impractical for the classroom environment, and the time allocated for these activities was insufficient. All these issues result in a loss of interest in lessons, which, in turn, leads to challenges and increased anxiety in language learning.

In language learning, students often face anxiety not only due to the fear of making mistakes during adolescence and the challenges of mastering grammar rules but also because of the pressure associated with exams (Littlewood, 1984). The study indicated that all students experienced anxiety during English exams, with some students feeling this anxiety exclusively in English assessments. Baş (2014) found that students tend to experience higher levels of anxiety in foreign language exams, concluding that these assessments induce more anxiety than exams in other subjects. Şahin et al. (2018) suggested that shifting away from an exam-focused approach in English lessons and emphasizing language as a tool for communication could help alleviate exam-related anxiety. Therefore, it can be argued that the exam-centered education system causes foreign language anxiety. Adopting contemporary assessment and evaluation methods, rather than concentrating solely on exams, would be a more effective strategy. Wu et al. (2025) study found that utilizing online testing methods, such as group projects, book reports, and presentations, instead of traditional paper-based tests, significantly reduced test anxiety. These innovative approaches can be evaluated and incorporated into our current curriculum. By blending technological applications with modern pedagogical strategies, teachers can create learning environments that are less anxiety-inducing for students.

According to another result related to the teaching system, the lack of knowledge stemming from ineffective online lessons, students' inability to access distance education due to technical issues, and their alienation from school culture contribute to foreign language anxiety. Ünal and Ekinçi (2021) assert that distance education is restrictive due to factors such as the inability to engage sensory modalities, a lack of diverse materials, and the limited application of various methods and techniques. Consequently, learning remains constrained because teachers are unable to provide sufficient variety. While these issues cause foreign language anxiety in distance education, one of the most significant anxiety-inducing factors in face-to-face education is overcrowded classrooms. In such environments, students struggle to follow the lesson, teachers have insufficient time to meet students' expectations, and there are fewer opportunities for engaging activities, all of which exacerbate foreign language anxiety. Overcrowded classrooms hinder effective foreign language instruction (Anşın, 2006; Tunç & Kozikoğlu, 2022), and excessive noise in these classes leads to a decline in motivation during the language learning process (Ünal, 2018). A study conducted by Tunç (2021) concluded that students faced challenges in following lessons in overcrowded classrooms, that teachers were unable to provide adequate guidance, and that students lacked sufficient opportunities for speaking practice. In this context, it is recommended that class sizes be adjusted to a level conducive to meaningful learning. Additionally, students should be taught in foreign language classrooms or laboratories where English lessons are conducted, and where target language materials and resources are readily available. By creating learning environments that engage students' interests, they will be more motivated to bridge their knowledge gaps.

Grammar is a crucial component of the foreign language learning process; however, when lessons are overly focused on grammar, they can induce anxiety among students. Many learners find grammar challenging and believe that excessive emphasis on it heightens their anxiety. A study conducted by Can and Işık-Can (2014) noted that foreign language lessons often prioritize knowledge acquisition and memorization, are evaluated through grades, and are heavily grammar-oriented, which poses a significant challenge in foreign language learning. Nikolov (2009) stated that young learners, who may not yet be cognitively prepared, can be adversely affected by the direct teaching of grammar rules, grammar exercises, and tests. Conversely, Wang (2012) found that one of the sources of anxiety for students learning English as a foreign language in the UK is the stress associated with mastering English grammar. The failure to develop and implement alternative, contemporary methods of grammar instruction, as opposed to traditional approaches, results in difficulties in grammar acquisition and exacerbates anxiety

among students. Kırkiç and Boray (2017) emphasize the necessity for modern methods and techniques that address classroom needs and overcome local barriers in language learning, rather than relying on traditional methods that do not recognize language as a tool for communication. Therefore, foreign language instruction should shift away from a grammar-centric approach and adopt communication-focused strategies that employ contemporary teaching methods, facilitating effective language use.

Another factor related to the teaching system that causes foreign language anxiety is the textbooks. The limited range of topics and insufficient exercises in these materials create challenges for students, leading to increased anxiety. Furthermore, research indicates that textbooks often fail to align with students' cognitive levels, and the visuals are frequently outdated. This situation diminishes students' interest in the lessons and exacerbates their anxiety. Similarly, Kırmızı (2009) noted that foreign language textbooks are inadequate in terms of content, subject sequencing, paper quality, visual elements, relevance to daily life, and topic coverage. Additionally, Özmat (2017) pointed out that the absence of communication skills and relevant texts in English textbooks contributes to students' boredom during lessons, resulting in decreased effectiveness. Students' boredom and lack of engagement make it difficult to comprehend the material, further increasing their foreign language anxiety. Therefore, it is crucial to recognize that textbooks are the primary resources for language instruction in schools. Rezai et al. (2025) emphasize the importance of educational materials that should engage students in cognitive, affective, and physical dimensions. For instance, textbooks could include problem-solving activities, project-based tasks, and real-world scenarios that challenge learners to apply their knowledge practically. Furthermore, this study reveals a significant finding: the subjects presented in these textbooks often do not align with the cultural and social backgrounds of the students, which can lead to increased foreign language anxiety. In this context, the perception that textbooks are inadequate in various respects and contribute to foreign language anxiety underscores the need for improvements in these educational resources. The content and scope of textbooks should be enhanced to effectively meet students' language learning needs. To gain a clearer understanding of this issue, it is recommended that further studies be conducted on the content of English textbooks.

Students reported that the most significant consequence of foreign language anxiety is academic failure. The study concluded that the academic success of students who experience foreign language anxiety is lower than that of their peers who experience less anxiety or none. Research in the literature indicates that foreign language anxiety is a critical factor influencing success in foreign language learning. High levels of foreign language anxiety have been shown to negatively impact academic achievement (Aida, 1994; Batumlu & Erden, 2007; Chan & Wu, 2004; Çakıcı, 2015; Doğan, 2008; Gardner, 1985; Horwitz et al., 1986; Horwitz, 2001; Hu et al., 2024; Öner & Gedikoğlu, 2007; Zhu, 2024). The study also concluded that students who experience academic failure due to foreign language anxiety often develop learned helplessness. According to Güler (2005), learned helplessness refers to the belief that one's reactions and behaviors are ineffective in achieving desired outcomes, leading to feelings of anxiety and fear stemming from the inability to fulfill personal aspirations, which in turn diminishes motivation to exert control over results. Students with foreign language anxiety frequently make mistakes, even in areas where they are knowledgeable, due to their anxiety. These errors subsequently lead to further mistakes, reinforcing the belief that they will never succeed. This pattern exemplifies the experience of learned helplessness. Another consequence of foreign language anxiety is the decline in students' classroom performance. Johnson's (1981) study, which investigated the behavioral consequences of learned helplessness in children who struggled academically and examined the relationship between learned helplessness, school success, and self-concept, yielded similar findings. Johnson discovered that students with high levels of learned helplessness exhibited lower academic performance compared to their peers. In summary, students who experience foreign language anxiety and do not receive recognition for their efforts may develop learned helplessness, resulting in decreased performance and academic failure. These three interrelated factors (decline in classroom performance, learned helplessness, and academic failure) are key consequences of foreign language anxiety.

The results reveal that students experience varying levels of foreign language anxiety and adopt different strategies to cope with it. The most preferred method for managing this anxiety is the use of technology. The study concluded that various smart board and smartphone applications, such as EBA, Morpha, Okulistik, Quizlet, Cambly, online books and activities, and Duolingo, effectively reduce foreign language anxiety. Consequently, both students and teachers benefit from these technological resources. Technology plays a crucial role in language learning by enabling students to apply what they have learned (Yeşilyurt, 2012). Furthermore, it is emphasized that technology-supported learning is essential for developing the knowledge, skills, and lifelong learning processes necessary to succeed in a rapidly changing world (Domalewska, 2014). Hung (2009) utilized an electronic blog application in his study, which provided students with the opportunity to practice speaking English and found a decrease in students' speaking anxiety levels. This study observed that as students increased their use of the language outside of school through technological applications, their language learning success improved, and their foreign language anxiety diminished. Similarly, in the study conducted by Yang et al., (2022) the researchers developed an online simulation game. They found that, compared to onsite instruction, the online simulation game was more effective in reducing foreign language anxiety among students with low, moderate, and high anxiety levels, thereby facilitating their English vocabulary learning. For this reason, technology should be integrated into language teaching, and educators must possess digital competence. Additionally, it is recommended to utilize educational technological applications that promote and develop foreign language learning both in the classroom and outside of school.

Although some peer attitudes can induce anxiety, participants utilize peer learning as a strategy to cope with foreign language anxiety. Teachers foster learning environments that are conducive to peer learning by enhancing classroom interaction through group activities and pair work. The findings indicate that students' foreign language anxiety diminishes when they engage in small group activities, as opposed to working individually in the classroom. Similarly, Liu and Jackson's (2008) study on the foreign language anxiety experienced by Chinese students revealed that while most students were willing to participate in group discussions, they felt uncomfortable speaking English in front of the entire class. In summary, the implementation of pair or group activities within the classroom environment significantly contributes to reducing students' anxiety and promoting interaction among peers (Scarcella & Oxford, 1992). Consequently, as peer interaction increases, negative peer attitudes in the classroom are minimized, the pressure on students is alleviated, and foreign language anxiety is mitigated. Similarly, Hoffman (2023) stated that positive peer relationships in the classroom appear to contribute to lower levels of anxiety. Therefore, it is recommended that educators increase positive classroom interactions by incorporating group activities, study groups, and pair work. Additionally, they should create opportunities for students to collaborate and support peer learning.

Teacher attitudes are comparable to those of peers. While harsh and judgmental attitudes can heighten anxiety, teachers who provide positive reinforcement, motivate and encourage students, and emphasize that making mistakes is a natural part of the learning process can help alleviate foreign language anxiety. Furthermore, research indicates that when teachers offer students opportunities to develop their self-efficacy beliefs and design their lessons with this in mind, it positively influences students' foreign language anxiety. Numerous studies support the notion that self-efficacy beliefs significantly reduce language anxiety and negative evaluations (Çimen, 2011; Ercanlar, 2019; Li et al., 2024; Orakçı et al., 2019). Finally, when teachers encourage students to come to class prepared and allocate time for preparation, students experience less anxiety. Therefore, it can be concluded that teachers' constructive criticism, support, and efforts to help students discover their potential and realize their abilities play a crucial role in reducing anxiety.

4.1. Limitations and Directions for Future Research

In conclusion, alongside the recommendations provided above for educators, several suggestions can be made for future research. This study was conducted as a case study in a typical public school, and has inherent limitations regarding generalizability, despite providing in-depth and significant insights into

foreign language anxiety. Therefore, it is recommended that future studies involve larger sample sizes to enhance generalizability, utilizing the qualitative data obtained from this research.

This study found that even students who believed they did not experience foreign language anxiety exhibited signs of such anxiety in certain situations. This finding highlights both the limitations and the valuable results of the research. Due to the absence of an anxiety scale appropriate for secondary school students, the anxiety levels of the participants were assessed based on their perceived foreign language anxiety and information gathered from their teachers. However, data collected during the interview process indicates that these students experienced foreign language anxiety at some point in their educational lives. Therefore, future research should investigate foreign language anxiety across different age groups using appropriate scales. Finally, this study revealed several interrelated factors contributing to foreign language anxiety. Therefore, conducting future studies that focus specifically on the causes of foreign language anxiety may provide a more comprehensive understanding of this phenomenon.

Statement of Researchers

Researchers' contribution rate statement:

BK: Conceptualization, data curation, formal analysis, investigation, methodology, project administration, software, resources, supervision, validation, writing- original draft preparation, writing - review & editing. LD: Formal analysis, investigation, methodology, project administration, software, resources, supervision, validation, writing - review & editing.

The authors contributed equally to the study.

Conflict statement:

The authors declare that they have no conflict of interest.

Data Availability Statement:

The data supporting this study's findings are available from the corresponding author upon reasonable request.

The data supporting this study's findings are available on request from the corresponding author. However, the data are not publicly available due to privacy or ethical restrictions.

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